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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 15, 2013
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 32:7-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17
Hymns: 234; 342; 324:1-6; 324:7-8

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 15:1-10

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' 10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Mission statements

It seems that in recent years there has been a far greater emphasis on organizations, schools, and even businesses having published mission statements. It is supposed to help keep the organization focused on their purpose so that they do not become sidetracked into other purposes, as wholesome as they might be, that detract from the original mission of the organization.

Without doubt the greatest organization on earth is the Universal Church. I don't mean a particular denomination, but the invisible Christian Church, the Church militant here on earth. Denominations organized by men will have their varying mission statements, and without doubt some will be seen by us as better than others. However, if we are to serve the Lord Jesus in our church lives than it is incumbent upon us to not only pay attention to the mission He has given us but to stay focused on that which we might see and learn from Him in the conduct of His ministry, so that we might better comprehend the mission of His life. There were different aspects to the ministry of Jesus Christ. He trained the disciples. He reached out to people and healed them of their diseases. However, the one aspect of His ministry that stands out and was served by all He said or did was His reaching out to sinners with the gospel of God's love and forgiveness. One might identify Jesus missions statement as --

THEME: Jesus Receives Sinners.

That this was observed by others, and not always with ready acceptance, is evident in our text as we see –

I. Jesus Criticized for Associating with Sinners.

Luke 15:1-2 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

In the previous chapter of his gospel Luke tells us of Jesus eating at the home of a Pharisee, and the lessons that came from that event. Now Luke tells us of how others came to Jesus, others with

whom the Pharisees would never associate, for they were tax collectors, and sinners. The tax collectors were generally despised because they were seen as disloyal to the Jewish people for serving the Roman government in collecting taxes for Rome. Also it was a common practice among them to overcharge the people, and so enrich themselves. Since they were not considered “good company” they were shunned by much of society, and the people who gathered about them were not regarded as “the proper sort of people.” They were “sinners,” not righteous, like the scribes and Pharisees. Some assume that this included prostitutes in the company, and at times that may have been so, but this was a general condemnation of those who were too worldly, or of a class of citizens that were not approved by the religious leaders of the people. Some would indeed say that Jesus didn’t use good judgment in associating with such people, for then He also might be identified with them. Indeed that was the goal of the Pharisees in their criticism. They wanted to put Jesus in a poor light.

However the Spirit’s message is clear. Jesus wasn’t with them to “party” with them. They had come to Jesus to hear Him, something the scribes and Pharisees didn’t do! We know of two very important gatherings in the homes of such despicable tax collectors. Matthew, one of the twelve disciples, was a one of these servants of Rome until the day came that the Lord Jesus called Matthew to leave all and follow Him. Matthew obeyed that calling, and invited others to his home that they might meet the Lord, and hear Him (Matthew 9:9-10). Again on a day when Jesus entered Jericho Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who was a man of short stature, climbed up in a tree so that he might see the Lord. The Lord called Zacchaeus down from that tree. Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus’ home that He might open Zacchaeus’ heart to repent. Again there was a gathering at this man’s home of others who desired to hear the word of the Lord (Luke 19:1-8).

The Pharisees saw only that these were despicable people, and that the Lord was associating Himself with them. Their assessment of the situation couldn’t have been more wrong. Something very different was happening. Jesus was with them that they might hear Him, and Jesus’ goal was to call them to repentance so that they might associate themselves with Him!

It is easy, oh, so very easy, for us to shun certain people, those whom we see to be different from us. It may be the cultural background, or the occupation or the socio/economic strata of society from which they come, but we find reason for seeing others as not being “quite right” for being around us. They may have a job that makes them smell different. Yes, I have had heard people object to others being in church because they had the odor of the barn or the plant where they worked still on them when they walked into church. But then others have seen the rich as being snobs, or the poor has being undesirable. Our flesh can come up with a multitude of objections, but the most dangerous of all is the same one the Pharisees maintained, that others were **sinners**, and not as righteous as they were. It is too easy to remember the sins and failings of others and be ready to characterize these individuals as sinners, labeling them as **unworthy** of associating with the Lord. **May God cleanse our hearts of all such hypocrisy!**

The Spirit reveals --

II. Jesus’ Search for the Lost Soul.

Jesus’ response to His critics came in the form of two parables. In the first Jesus appealed to the agrarian culture so familiar to the Jews. They understood that the shepherd cared for all the sheep. They could understand that the shepherd wouldn’t decide that the loss of one sheep was not such a big deal as long as the ninety-nine were still safe and secure. The Lord has a concern for the lost sheep, each and every lost sheep.

Jesus would later declared this of Himself and His mission:

Luke 19:10 “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

He did not shy away from the sinner. He sought them out, not to associate with them in their sin, but to call them to repentance. It was the Lord’s goal to turn the sinner away from his sin, and to a true and living faith in the Lord as their Redeemer. This is what drove Jesus to work tirelessly in His ministry. We cannot overstate His loving concern for the soul of sinful mankind!

The second parable reinforces the lesson of the first.

Luke 15: 8 “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?”

I believe any of us can identify with this parable. Haven't we all misplaced something that was of value or significant importance to us? Haven't we all at one time or another found ourselves going through the house from top to bottom, sifting through the materials in draws or desk looking for that document we needed? Haven't we tried to remember where we had placed it, where we might have last used it? We may recall putting it somewhere for safe keeping, you know just to make sure we didn't lose it, and then we can't find it! I don't know how many times I have gone through suit coat pockets looking for a check or a letter someone handed me at church or a conference! So we know that sense of urgency, that sense of almost desperation, because the need to find this item is so great that a long and thorough search is called for. It is not something easily shrugged off as a matter of little consequence. No, it is like that silver coin that was needed by that woman, it was important to that woman.

So the Lord is teaching us of God's attitude toward the soul of the lost sinner. So we may think, “But there are several billion souls in this fallen world,” yet each is still precious and important to the Lord. The lost soul in some distant land is as precious to the Lord as the neighbor we have next door, is as precious to the Lord as each of our souls. Each soul is a soul for which the Lord suffered and died. Each and every soul in this entire world is a soul that has been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. It is not the Lord's desire that the sinner die, so we read in -

Ezekiel 33:11 “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.’”

And so Jesus' mission statement is reinforced:

Luke 19:10 “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The point of the lesson is strengthened by the Lord detailing heaven's reaction to the successful rescue of the lost sheep.

III. The Lord's Joy Over Each Sinner that Repents.

Jesus concludes the first parable with words of joy.

Luke 15:5-7 And when he has found it(the lost sheep), he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

There is joy in the heart of that shepherd when he finds his lost sheep, a joy that cannot be contained, that he has no desire to contain, a joy that he shares with others. He has fulfilled his purpose, he has found that which was lost! And so Jesus would draw the parallel with the lost soul. There is joy, great joy over the lost soul that is found, over the sinner who repents. There is certainly more joy over the sinner who repents than over ninety-nine persons who see themselves as being just and righteous within themselves, having no need of repentance.

A similar conclusion is given to the second parable of the lost coin.

Luke 15:9-10 "And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' 10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Jesus draws that immediate parallel to the reaction of the angels in heaven. Joy is to be found in heaven over each and every soul that repents of its sin, and comes to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is what the Lord is all about. This is what the gospel is all about. The Lord loves sinners with an everlasting love. This love was displayed in the cross. The message of this love needs to be shared with people everywhere, people of every class, and color, and language across the globe. It needs to be shared with the understanding that a great and wonderful thing happens when a

soul, yes, even just one soul, yes, indeed each and individual soul, is called to faith and everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

May Jesus' love fill our hearts so that we appreciate the grace and love He holds in His heart for us sinners whom He calls to repentance and everlasting life! May Jesus' love for souls fill our hearts that we also may be driven to search out the lost, and share the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. May the joy of heaven over each sinner that repents fill our hearts that we may rejoice with the angels of heaven as we join in the praise and glory of our Savior God.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.