

September 15, 2019  
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Luke 15:1-32

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him [Jesus], but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them he addressed this parable. "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you; in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

"Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.'

In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. "After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."

"So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

"Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

### **Background:**

The gospel for last week focused on being prepared for the difficulties and alienation that will be part of being a disciple of Jesus. Following that in Luke's gospel is Jesus' short teaching that draws on the everyday experience of salt that has lost its usefulness and needs to be discarded. Luke then records Jesus telling the three parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son that are today's gospel. The last parable, the story of the prodigal son, was the gospel text for the fourth Sunday of Lent, and it may be omitted this Sunday. However, these three parables highlight the joy of God in finding the lost, in response to the criticism of the Pharisees and the scribes in the first verses of this gospel text.

The first verse of the text describes the situation. Jesus is associating with tax collectors and sinners. The traditional wisdom of the Pharisees would have seen a vast difference between feeding sinners and actually sitting down to dinner with one. The first action was praiseworthy, the second was unthinkable, because it made the person himself unclean and unfit for God's realm. Jesus' eating with sinners and tax collectors was an outrage in their eyes. In the three parables of this gospel text, Jesus addresses their attitude and their way of looking at what it is that truly pleases God.

Shepherds were ritually unclean and looked down upon. Jesus' question, "What man among you having a hundred sheep..." is asking them to think of themselves as shepherds. This kind of question would be taken as an insult. The second parable does not ask the question directly, but implies "Which woman among you, having ten coins, and losing one...?" There were no women among the scribes or the Pharisees. Women were considered inferior to men. In Jesus' era, men and women did not associate in public together. These parables have an edge to them that is not immediately apparent to the contemporary reader. What is apparent are the lavish responses of the shepherd and the woman when they find what has been lost. The joy cannot be contained – friends and neighbors are invited to join the celebration.

The third, and longest, parable has come to be known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. "Prodigal" can be used as either an adjective or a noun. As an adjective, it describes one who is excessive or extravagant. As a noun it means wasteful. The text certainly suggests that the younger son was extravagant in the way he spent his inheritance. But it also hints that the older brother would have longed for the reckless abandon that his younger brother has achieved. He accuses his father of favoritism and of not even giving him a goat to celebrate with his friends. He is more concerned that he had not gotten his share of the estate to have his own celebration than he is concerned about his brother, his father, or how their community understands his absence.

In terms of extravagance, the father outdoes both sons. The Father totally abandons his own interests and jeopardizes his reputation in the community. First, he gives the younger son his portion of the estate before his own death. He is risking his future means of support in both the giving of the money to the son and in letting him abandon his responsibility to care for the father in his old age. When the son returns, the father's behavior is imprudent. He hosts a lavish party and risks his own reputation in the community, who has good reason to view him as man unable to manage his sons and his resources. But he kills the fatted calf, not a sheep or a goat. This provides enough food for the entire community. If they attend a banquet that celebrates the restoration of the son, they are bound to also accept the restored relationship.

It is the actions of the eldest son that connect the parables to the beginning of the gospel text. His attitude mirrors that of the scribes and Pharisees who see themselves as faithfully fulfilling all their religious obligations, but they have lost the ability to be compassionate toward the sinner. The parables that Jesus tells contrast the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees with God's attitude. God cannot help but celebrate the return; God's joy cannot be contained and flows out to friends and neighbors as they are invited to join the celebration

Considering the context of this text in Luke's gospel can also be helpful. Since Jesus determined to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), Jesus has been teaching the disciples about the values of the reign of God and the cost of discipleship. These three parables can also be seen as part of that instruction. The Pharisees' and the scribes' approach in proclaiming the reign of God is to protect their relationship with God by carefully protecting the sacredness of that relationship. In doing so, they model a faithful life with God to others. Jesus in these parables presents an alternative way of inviting people to a relationship with God. The three parables here proclaim a God who expresses unbelievably lavish joy and desire to celebrate in the event of even one sinner's return.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Recall a time when you believed you had lost something/someone precious. What were some of the thoughts and feeling that went through you?
2. Have you ever reconnected with a good friend that you had lost contact with? What was your reunion like?
3. When you think of people who are sincere in their desire to faithfully live their relationship with God...
4. When you think of people who seem devoted to living gospel values in their daily lives...
5. Has a person you look upon as a close friend ever written you off? What did that feel like?

6. Jesus asked the scribes and the Pharisees to imagine themselves as a shepherd, or as a woman. What would be the equivalent for you? Why would Jesus ask you to think of yourself as a \_\_\_\_\_ ?
7. Why do you think Jesus tells these three parables?
8. Why do you think Luke chose to include them in his Gospel?
9. Can you take some time to talk with God openly about whatever it is that most struck you in these three parables?

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### **Excerpts from the readings for September 15, 2019, the Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The Lord said to Moses, “Your people have become depraved. They have turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, ‘This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ “I see how stiff-necked this people is. Let me alone, that my wrath may consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation.” But Moses implored the Lord, “Why should your wrath blaze up against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with so strong a hand? Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and how you swore to them, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.’” So the Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

*I will rise and go to my father. Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; wipe out my offense. Wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me. A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled you will not spurn.*

Beloved: I am grateful to him who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry. I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and arrogant, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. The grace of our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; I am the foremost. I was mercifully treated, so that in me Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life. To the king of ages, the only God, honor and glory forever.

The Pharisees and scribes complained, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he said, “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he

calls to his friends and neighbors, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'

In the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

"What woman having ten coins and losing one would not sweep the house carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she calls to her friends and neighbors, 'Rejoice with me, I have found what I had lost.' In the same way there will be rejoicing among the angels over one sinner who repents." Then he said,

"A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had spent everything, a famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to a local citizen to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'My father's workers have more than enough, but I am dying from hunger. I shall go and say to my father, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.'"

So he got went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and, filled with compassion, he ran to his son, and embraced him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Bring the finest robe to put on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Slaughter the fattened calf and let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was lost, and has been found.'

Then the celebration began. When the older son asked what this might mean. A servant said to him, 'your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because Your brother has returned.' He became angry, and refused to enter the house. When his father came out, he said, 'All these years I served you and not once did I disobey you; yet you never gave me even a goat to feast on with my friends.' He said to him, 'My son, you are with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

**Excerpts from Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; (Lk 15:18) Psalm 51:3-19; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; and Luke 15:1-32**