

Marks

of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond
the Church

October 23, 2022

Day 1: Luke 15:1-2

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

The Pharisees and scribes have been frustrated by Jesus' refusal to conform to their norms of social interaction. What marked someone as a member of the "real" people of God (in their opinion) was the keeping of the Law (as they articulated it), especially the purity laws. John the Baptist (Luke 3:12-14) and Jesus (Luke 15:1-2) are challenging the Pharisaic view of who is part of the family by saying membership is based on repentance, not being born Jewish and keeping the Law. If God did not welcome sinners nobody would be in the family of God for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Question: Why are tax-collectors mentioned with the sinners?

Challenge: Are there some groups you would not want to eat with? Why?

Scripture: Luke 3:7-18

Day 2: Luke 15:3-4

So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?'

An average family may have between 5 and 15 sheep, which makes the owner of these 100 sheep wealthy. Even though the owner would have hired help to tend this many sheep, it is not the shepherds who go looking for the sheep but the owner. God is the owner and the fact that the owner goes to get the sheep is an indictment against the other shepherds. They are supposed to care for the sheep but do not go looking for the lost one. God does not think it is acceptable that any are lost. God does not see us as if we are one of many, we are each important and equally valued by God.

Question: A one in a hundred loss ratio does not seem bad. Why risk losing more to look for the one?

Challenge: How did God find you?

Scripture: Matthew 19:30-20:16

Day 3: Luke 15:5-6

When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

Sheep can become quickly agitated and disoriented if separated by any distance from the flock, so much so that they would have to be carried back. The image of the owner carrying the sheep is an indictment against the legal experts in verse 1 who are grumbling about Jesus' practice of table fellowship. It is in fact Jesus who acts consistent with God's command to care for the sheep. The prophet says, "God will seek out the sheep, rescue them and care for them" - feed them (Ezekiel 34:11-15). In Jesus' ministry (especially table fellowship) the words of the prophet have come to pass.

Question: How would you respond to an invitation to come and celebrate the finding of something lost?

Challenge: When have you felt "carried back" from some trauma?

Scripture: Luke 10:29-37

Day 4: Luke 15:7

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

Jesus now connects the parable with its meaning for those He has invited to the table and to associate with Him. They are the sinners who have repented. It is their repentance that has made them welcome at the table, not their observance of purity laws. They have cleaned up on the inside even if the outside might still be a bit dirty. Jesus also connects the celebration on earth for the lost that are found with joy in heaven. There is no hint that God loves the "righteous" less, but that celebration is the only correct response to one who has repented.

Question: What do you think the term "righteous" means? It does not mean good.

Challenge: What would be a good type of celebration for someone who has just professed the Christian faith?

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

Day 5: Luke 15:8

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?'

The scene shifts from a relatively wealthy shepherd to an improvised woman. Both are images of God and are used to underscore how important each individual is to God. The woman's loss may be more critical to her well being than the loss of 1 in a hundred sheep, however God is just as concerned about 1 in a hundred as 1 in ten. God does not operate on good enough but on all being part of the family of God.

Question: How long does she search for the lost coin?

Challenge: How long did God search for you?

Scripture: Luke 12:16-21

Day 6: Luke 15:9-10

When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

The theme of joy is continued by the example of the woman looking for a lost coin. Both parables move toward the celebration after the lost are found. Though the parables do not explicitly mention a meal in the gathering of the neighbors to celebrate, it would involve eating of some sort. Jesus is saying that there is joy in heaven when sinners come together to celebrate their new found faith. If heaven is happy why aren't we here on earth eating with those who have found faith? In fact, we do celebrate our faith and belief in Christ as Lord - it is called communion. Sinners especially are welcome to the table.

Question: Why do you think we have an open communion?

Challenge: After reading these parables think about when you have been in the position of the "found" and in the position of the scribes that are grumbling about too many sinners at the table.

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14