

Sermon for Trinity 3 – Luke 15:1-10

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The parables of our Lord are always right on target. And these parables of the lost sheep and lost coin are no exception. Christ tells of a shepherd who had lost one of his one hundred sheep. He seeks out the lost one and then he finds it. And when he finds the lost sheep, he rejoices and carries the sheep on his shoulders. He rejoices with such great joy that he throws a party with his friends and neighbors over finding this one lost sheep.

So likewise, in the second parable, Christ tells of a woman who has lost one of her ten silver coins. She lights the lamp and sweeps the house and diligently seeks the coin and finds it. Much like the shepherd, she rejoices and celebrates with her friends and neighbors over finding the lost coin.

These parables hit the mark; they're right on target! But just who is the target? Who is Jesus addressing? "...the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" The Pharisees and scribes: those religious elites of first century religion, witnessed tax collectors and sinners drawing near to Jesus. What's more, Christ was welcoming, even urging, these notorious sinners to join Him! So they grumbled their judgment: "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

To this audience, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. Ironically, shepherds, like the one who lost the sheep, and women, like the one who lost the coin, were probably not in the crowd that day, and certainly not numbered among the Pharisees and scribes. Nevertheless, these parables do address them. As lost coins, the scribes and Pharisees remained in the House of Israel. The Lord sought earnestly that they might be found acknowledging their pride and sins, repenting, and receiving the only righteousness that counts: the forgiveness that Jesus alone gives.

And like the shepherd who lost the sheep, the Pharisees and scribes were spiritual shepherds over the faithful of Israel. They were entrusted with the Word of God, particularly, the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets. The scribes and Pharisees were to use these to feed the house of Israel, that all might have full and abundant life. However, they chose to feed the sheep entrusted to their care the rank fodder of self-righteous works and hypocritical legalisms. The result? Scattered and lost sheep, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had predicted: "'Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!' declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: 'You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds,' declares the Lord." "Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ... The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them." The scribes and Pharisees were to be the shepherds of the house of Israel, yet they did not care for those entrusted to them.

The parables of the Lord are right on target. So Fathers. Dads. Daddies. Papas. Have you been a faithful shepherd? Have you cared for your sons and daughters and all those entrusted to your care? Have you provided for their physical needs? Have you taken time out of your schedule to spend time with them? Have you even taken time to think about them? Do you rule over them with force and harshness instead of gentleness and tenderness? Or are you apathetic and lazy in leading them? And what about their spiritual care? Have you prayed for those who are entrusted to your care? Have you instructed them in the foundations of the faith? Luther begins the 5 of the 6 chief parts of the Small Catechism with the heading: "As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household." Can your children, even your grown children, articulate the Christian faith? Have you scatted those entrusted to you?

This brings to mind the question: "Do you have to be a better man in order to be a true Christian?" Both Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees answer affirmatively: "Of course you must!" But how one becomes a better man is the true difference between our Lord and the Pharisees. For the Pharisees, one must reach a certain moral standard of being a better man. One must exemplify characteristics that society deems respectable.

But Jesus taught something entirely different. Highly-regarded and moral people had no monopoly on becoming His disciples. He was at home with those who were considered by others to be less worthy. He received sinners and ate with them. He counted them as friends. He wanted to socialize with them. He was a friend of tax collectors and sinners; even with the sinners in this very room: every father, mother, son, daughter, widow, and orphan. Those who are well have no need of a physician, but only those who are sick. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners. We do not become disciples, nor are we disciples because we have so many good qualities. Rather, we are disciples because we have so many faults. We don't come to Jesus because we are better than others, but because we are just as bad, if not worse!

So then, does Jesus make no demands of us? He makes only one requirement, and it's this: that we receive what He has to give. We receive His forgiveness. We listen to His Word and receive it as our greatest treasure. From His Word come other great gifts: repentance, faith, good deeds, and the even our becoming better and improved people. But these are not prerequisites; they are only the immeasurable gifts which come from receiving God's gifts.

The thief on the cross didn't have an opportunity to become a better man. He had no time to reach a moral standard and demonstrate good works to prove it. And yet, no man has received a more unconditional promise of salvation as he did. Jesus told him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." The thief had the one thing necessary: the promise of Jesus. And He received that promise and that's all he needed.

That promise is for you, dads. Christ gathers the ones that we lose. In fact, he rejoices in all sinners whom He seeks and finds. And so when you receive God's gifts, His Word, His Sacrament of the Altar, His Baptism, He delights in you. Receive Christ's forgiveness. Make the angels rejoice. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠