

**TBD**

**September 12, 2010**

**[Luke 15:1 – 10](#) | [Theatrical Reading](#)**

**The reading of God's Word for the people of God.**

<sup>1</sup>Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup>Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup>I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup>"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

<sup>11</sup>Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

**This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray:

*God of All Creation, You are a shepherd to all people who hear Your voice and obey Your commands. We pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us; your church and your people, to call to those who, like sheep, have wandered from your will and way for their lives. May we learn to hear Your voice and recognize it in the rush and busyness of everyday life. In the name of the risen savior, Your Son (our Lord). Amen.*

I am not sure if you have realized it or not, but reading today begins with exactly the same words that started our reading during the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent. The Season of Lent called each of us to a season of awareness and so as we searched deep within ourselves this past Season and examined not only our awareness of God's Call on each of our lives, but sought an awareness of our responsibility to serve others, tend to their needs and put our own concerns aside for the bringing of God's Kingdom into this world. I think it's wonderful that we are given an opportunity to look at these words again. The Lenten reading left us with many questions about the relationship between community with sinners and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Today, during the Season of Common Time we revisit this reading in its entirety and so we become better equipped today to answer the questions that may have been hovering in our minds for all these weeks since the days preceding Easter.

The primary question we posed last March was, "How is it that Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners is an important introduction into the parable of what many of us has come to know as the parable of the 'Prodigal Son?'" It would have been easy to bypass the same opening lines of our Lenten Reading that opens our reading today. We, however, drew attention to these lines because we realize that these lines would not be present in the lectionary reading if they did not offer some matter of importance for us and so, again, we read those same words today.

"Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" (vv. 1 – 2) The opening lines of the text are not unfamiliar to most of us. Regardless of our level of biblical knowledge, our denominational background, or doctrinal teachings; we know that Jesus was comfortable eating with tax collectors and sinners. And why not? Aren't

we all sinners? Each and every time we assemble together; whether it is for lunch with a friend, meeting up with those we study and work with, or assembling for Sunday worship, we find ourselves in the company of sinners. It is through this realization and recognition that we *level the playing field*, so to speak, as we lessen the margins of modern culture and begin to view one another in the way that our Creator views us – as not only equals in creation but equals in experience, in call and in service to our Risen Savior through the acknowledgement that each of us, though seemingly different in the eyes of man, are in fact not so different in the eyes of God.

Simply stated, we are human, we make mistakes and we must be forgiven by one another in the same way and with the same presence of the radically inclusive love that God will forgive and has forgiven each of us. The gift of forgiveness is freely given to each of us by the grace of God, but we must accept it for ourselves; this is the difference between the legalism of religion and relationship with our God. Likewise, we must view one another through the eyes of God, the same eyes that Paul had for mankind as he wrote letters to the churches of his day and encouraged them to hold strong to the faith and the very same eyes that Paul had for Onesimus as he wrote to Philemon and his family appealing for their acceptance his conversion and new found usefulness.

It is tempting to define the lost in these parables as those outside the synagogue, those outside of our modern day communities of faith. However, in recalling that these parables are in response to the words spoken by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law we come to understand it is not the religiously obscure minority to whom Jesus is referring to as lost, but rather Christ is speaking to those who are in the religious and cultural majority; those who have failed to effectively carry out the call of God on their lives. The “lost” are not the “outsiders” but the

“insiders,” and when the religiously self righteous, who have placed their own needs before others repents; there is great joy in heaven. ([http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_lost\\_sheep\\_coin\\_son\\_GA.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_lost_sheep_coin_son_GA.htm))

Many denominations have converted this parable into an evangelism story about Jesus offering new hope to the “lost” who are outside the church. That is, many relay these teachings to be about the importance of finding the “lost souls” outside the church who are not in relationship with God. This interpretation is a very important teaching for each of us, but the power behind these teachings is in acknowledging that the words of Jesus are being directed to the “insiders” in the synagogue and equally by many who are already a part of our churches today. The Parables are directed to those people who are not mindful of their own sinfulness and their own need to be cleansed by the powers of God. The people “inside” the synagogue or each of us in the church need to be repent, be cleansed of the crud in their lives, and “make contact” with the power and light of God and Jesus. Failure to do so prevents growth, nurtures legalism and prevents God’s will and way for our lives to become all our call has been ordained to become. ([http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series\\_c\\_lost\\_sheep\\_coin\\_son\\_GA.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_c_lost_sheep_coin_son_GA.htm))

As our Emmaus students are coming to know in their study of Scripture, the Bible is comprised of enumerable themes and teachings. Many Biblical scholars have considered this set of parables to be the pinnacle of the teachings that Christ offered during his three years of traveling, teaching, and preparing the world for God’s New Covenant with Creation. In summation, many have called Luke 15, “The Heart of the Gospels.” Where is your heart today? Is it in the materials of this world, in the wiles of human existence, in the comfort of your salvation or is it beating for the lost souls of Creation; for those who have either willingly turned from or have been involuntarily forced away from God’s call and God’s plan for their lives? Are you setting yourself up as a candidate for Christian of the Year, reminding yourself and all those

who listen how wonderfully saved and blessed you are; or are you telling others about the radically inclusive message of Christ love given not for a few, but for all who are seeking and being sought.

God our Creator seeks reconciliation with each of us, but exactly what part of that reconciliation becomes our responsibility? Our responsibility is in accepting that life is not about us, our wants and our desires; but rather life is about our call to be a servant to *all*, A – L – L, ALL; men, women, young people, blacks, Latinos, those affected by and living with HIV/AIDS, those who are homeless, those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised by society and especially those who God sends into our lives, if for only but a moment. We cannot serve everyone, but we can all serve someone and so I encourage each of us to make this message a part of our lives today.

There will come a time in each of our lives when we will be approached by those who have hurt us, those who have used us, and by those who have caused us pain. Will we be excited when we are faced with what we believed to have been lost? The shepherd found joy in the finding of a single sheep that had been lead astray; the woman found joy when she found the money she had misplaced and the man expressed great joy as his Son, whom he had come to believe he had lost forever returned home. Have you ever misplaced your keys or your wallet? Remember the joy you felt when you found them? This is the unspeakable joy that Christ is teaching through these parables. Not the joy of legalism and piety, but rather the joy of reconciliation and relationship with God our Creator.

In closing this morning I encourage you to search diligently for whatever it is that God has given you that you may have lost. No one can define this for you; you must do that for yourself and if you are sitting here this morning comfortable with your life and confident of your

salvation with no thought of those who may be hurting around you, then you may want to consider rereading these parables today. God may just be speaking to you.

Not in the confidence of *our* hope for tomorrow, but rather in the confidence of the hope for a tomorrow for *others*, let us offer thanksgiving and praise today for God's will and way for each of our lives. Amen!