

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: September 5 – 11, 2016

Lectionary Readings: Exodus 32:7–14, Psalm 51:1–10, 1Timothy 1:12–17, Luke 15:1–10

Prayer of the Day: *O God, overflowing with mercy and compassion, you lead back to yourself all those who go astray. Preserve your people in your loving care, that we may reject whatever is contrary to you and may follow all things that sustain our life in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*

This week's references come from the following sources. The appropriate resource will be referenced at the end of an entry by using the letters preceding each resource listed here.

- BB: Brenden Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*
- BPS: Brian P. Stoffregen's commentary notes (Pr, Faith Luth, Yuma AZ) Crossmarks.com/brian
- DT: David L. Tiede, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*
- JS: John Shea, *The Relentless Widow (Luke)*
- L: Lectionary.com
- LTJ: Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*
- NISB: *New Interpreter's Study Bible*"
- SPMc: Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*
- WP: WorkingPreacher.org (Luther Seminary)
 - Greg Carey (2010), Prof. of NT, Lancaster Theological Seminary, PA
 - David Lose (2010 & 2013), Luther Seminary, *Dear Working Preacher*
 - Lois Malcolm (2013), Assoc. Prof. Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary

Background information on this text:

- “. . . it helps to note the careful construction of the sequence as a whole. The three parables (the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Lost Son and Brother [4th Sunday in Lent]) share a common theme (loss-finding-celebration) that becomes explicit, in a refrain-like way, at several points (v. 7 and v. 9; v. 7 and v. 10; v. 24 and v. 32). An opening indication of setting (vv. 1-3) provides a unifying framework for the whole: tax collectors and sinners are approaching Jesus to hear him, provoking the Pharisees and scribes to complain ‘this fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them’ (v. 2). So Jesus tells the three parables as a defense and justification for celebrating the acceptance of God (‘the year of acceptance on the part of the Lord’ (4:19). In essence, the sequence replaces a ‘sin/forgiveness’ trajectory with a trajectory of ‘human beings lost/human beings found.’ The first trajectory is that of the scribes and Pharisees, the second that of Jesus and ultimately of God. . . . Both parables begin with a question. . . Both, then, invite hearers to reflect upon what would be their own response.” (BB, 142)
- Luke 15:1-10 launches an extended reflection on one of the most provocative aspects of Jesus' ministry, his companionship with tax collectors and sinners.

Context is everything here. The passage includes a setting (15:1-2) followed by the parables of the Lost Sheep (15:3-7) and the Lost Coin (15:8-10). It sets the table for the grand third parable concerning things lost, the parable of the Lost Son (15:11-32). Moreover, Luke 15:1-10 follows close upon the parable of the Banquet, in which the "poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind" replace the anticipated guest list (14:15-24).

Luke makes Jesus' companionship with sinners a special point of emphasis. Like Mark and Matthew, Luke relates the call of Levi and the debate concerning Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners (5:27-32). Luke alone provides the story of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet with her tears (7:36-50), in my opinion a radical redaction of the anointing at Bethany from Mark 14:3-9. Luke alone also includes the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14) and the account of Zacchaeus, the tax collector whose

company Jesus requires (19:1-10). We might add Jesus' behavior on the cross, praying forgiveness for his executioners (23:34) and blessing the neighboring thief (23:43).

... Luke provides a mixed message: Jesus seeks to bring sinners to repentance (5:32), but not once does Jesus actually scold or correct a sinner. Instead, he eats with them. Four times Luke reports (a) meals in which (b) Jesus receives criticism for (c) his relationship with sinners, but (d) Jesus never once comments on the sinners' behavior (5:27-32; 7:36-50; 15:1-32; and 19:1-10). We might note that all three of the parables in Luke 15 assume celebrations, or meals." (Greg Carey, WP)

- About Parables: "Narrative time bombs.

That's what Eugene Peterson once described parables as, and I think he's right. Which is what can make reading and preaching them so vexing. We want to explain parables, usually reading them either as analogies to be decoded or puzzles to be solved. Either way, we try to tame them, even domesticate them, when all along parables favor detonation over explanation.

The closest thing in our experience to a parable is probably a riddle, something that takes a little figuring out, for sure, but whose real meaning can't be reduced to an equation, usually sneaks up on you, and almost always has something of a kick to it. Which means that more often than not, it's only a while after you've read a parable that it really hits you, setting off a series of possibilities and experiences you couldn't have imagined when you first read it...

Take today's reading from Luke, for example. It narrates two of three parables in a row on being lost and found, each of which has the potential to surprise and disrupt our usual notions of the religious life. But you have to slow down to catch it. The context Luke supplies is critical. Jesus is upsetting the religious authorities. And, although we know this, it's important to remind ourselves that these aren't bad folks -- they're the ones who really care about their faith, the first-century equivalent of elders, church council members, and Sunday School superintendents. Interestingly, they're upset not because of what Jesus says, but rather because of the company he keeps. He's hanging out with, talking to, and most notoriously sharing meals with sinners." (Lose, WP)

- "Here's the question that's been rumbling around in my head since reading this passage: Can you be righteous and still lost?

... the major differentiating category in these parables seems to be, for lack of a better word, lost-ness. Which is interesting, because at first everything seems to revolve around the distinction between sinner and righteous. After all, Luke sets the context for Jesus telling three of his better known parables (we deal with the two short ones this week) as, first, the tax collectors and sinners flocking to listen to Jesus and, second, the Pharisees and scribes grumbling because he not only *doesn't* send them away but actually eats with them.

Two quick notes on all this. Eating isn't catching a quick bite at the local coffee house and moving on. Eating -- that is, sharing table fellowship -- is a mark of camaraderie, acceptance, and friendship. And so in eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus is demonstrating a deep and abiding acceptance of those society has deemed beyond the moral pale.

, , , the second thing: while we're used to thinking 'we're all sinners,' that's not the way Luke sees it. Rather, when he describes someone as a "sinner" he's talking about someone whose pattern of sinning is so habitual, even second nature, that the whole community knows of it. Similarly, by 'righteous' Luke doesn't mean those who are either perfect or self-righteous, but rather he describes those who actually and actively try to live up to the law. All of which means that Jesus is welcoming the local untouchables and ne'er-do-wells, the moral disgraces and public outcasts -- welcoming, accepting, and befriending, to the point of embarrassment. And the decent folk are -- quite understandably -- concerned.

In that context, Jesus tells some stories. But they're not, as soon becomes clear, stories about the difference between sinner and righteous. Rather, they are about things we lose -- a sheep, a coin, a son -- and the joy we experience when we find these things again.

This is where the kick comes in. Most of Jesus parables, you see, have a bit of a bite or kick to them -- something that doesn't set quite right and keeps you thinking, wondering, wrestling with the story until you begin to wonder if you've understood it all. In these stories it's the reaction of the shepherd and woman. . . .“(Lose, *Dear WP*, 2013)

- “15:1-32 Chap. 14 had as its setting table fellowship, and chap. 16 will be concerned, likewise, with issues of hospitality and meals. This hyperconcern with welcoming into one's home people who lie on the margins of society forms a helpful frame for understanding the dual purpose of chap. 15. On the one hand, Jesus is in the dock, called upon to defend his practices on behalf of *the poor*, including tax collectors and sinners. On the other hand, Jesus turns the tables, raising the question as to whether the Pharisees and the legal experts will join him in adopting a divine point of view, which would lead them to welcome such lost persons as if they were family and friends and celebrate their recovery at the banquet table. In vv. 3-32, Jesus responds to the issue raised in vv. 1-2.” (NISB, 1883)
- “The parable of the lost sheep (15:1-8) is told also y Matthew (18:12-14), but the parable of the lost coin (vv. 9-10) is only in Luke ... Each parable is a wondrous revelation of the extravagance of God's concern for the **lost** and **joy** at **repentance**, but taken together they are a sustained testimony to God's passion and freedom in seeking the lost and the splendid **joy of heaven** over the salvation of people who appear to e insignificant and wayward.
... in the opening verses of Chapter 15, Jesus is criticized once again for the company he keeps at table (see also 5:29-32). But Jesus does not respond with sharp prophetic warnings or declarations of reversal. These parables are unadulterated words of promise.
... these three parables (includes the Parable of the lost son, 15:11-32) constitute a coherent response to the objection of **the Pharisees and the scribes** at the beginning of the chapter (vv. 1-3). The parables of the shepherd (vv. 4-7) and the woman (vv. 8-10) are so parallel that they complement and interpret each other ... Luke 15 offers another unqualified assurance of God's 'good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (12:32).
The outline of [verses 1-10] demonstrates how thoroughly parallel they are in content as well as structure. This parallelism could be the result of Luke's shaping the 'lost coin' parable after the model of the 'lost sheep,' and the concluding references to **repentance** are probably Lukan. But it seems probable that both parables were traditional pieces, told in similar terms, and if one were remembered in the oral tradition, the other would be too.” (DT, 272-273)
- “... the two parables share a basic structure. (a) One is lost from a much larger group, (b) the protagonist goes to great lengths to seek out the lost item, (c) the finder invites friends for a celebration, and (d) Jesus offers the moral of the story.” (Carey, WP)

Day 1

Luke 15:1-10

15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So he told them this parable: ⁴“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? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And 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.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 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? ⁹When 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.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Read through the entire Gospel lesson:

- We invite you to continue journaling as a part of your devotional/meditative time.
- Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you.
- What do you think God might be saying in this story? Record this in your journal.

Day 2

Luke 15:1-2

15Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Background:

- 15:1-3 “Luke’s introduction to the whole chapter is dramatic. If all (Gk. *pantos*) **the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him**, it would seem to be a large group. That they were coming **to hear** is a direct link back to 14:35 where ‘those who have ears to hear’ were commanded to hear. Luke is again emphasizing that large groups in Israel did ‘hear’ Jesus, and yet Jesus’ following was not among the recognized religious authorities. The murmuring of the **Pharisees and the scribes** over Jesus’ meal fellowship with **tax collectors and sinners** will appear again when ‘all murmured’ at his eating with the ‘sinner’ and ‘tax collector’ Zacchaeus. These issues of meal fellowship were serious considerations within Israel, long before the question of eating with Gentiles appeared...” (DT, 273)
- 15:1-2 “The Pharisees and legal experts, positioned here as Jesus’ antagonists, present the challenge that will occupy Jesus throughout this chapter (cf. 5:29-32; 19:1-10). What one eats and with whom one eats are key issues in drawing and maintaining socioreligious boundaries.
 - “Although one of the ironies in Luke is that Jesus was eating with Pharisees and lawyers in the previous chapter (14:1-24)! Green (*The Gospel of Luke*) notes the two different responses to Jesus’ table fellowship:
‘Sharing a meal has the potential function of generating intimacy and creating group solidarity. In some meal-episodes, notably among toll collectors and sinners (e.g., 5:29-32), this end is successfully realized, while in others, notably among scribes and Pharisees, table fellowship terminates in protest and hostility (e.g., 7:36-50; 11:37-54). The fundamental difference between these two is not whether the good news is operative in one but not the other, but in how the various groups respond to Jesus’ presence and message. As in the earlier meal scene of 5:29-32, so here ‘sinners’ and ‘the righteous’ are presented in parodic ways -- the former as repentant, the latter as unaware of their need for good news’ [p. 575].” (BPS)
 - “The necessary framework for understanding these three parables of the lost is provided in 15:1-2. These verses recapitulate the narrative theme established by 7:29-30 concerning the division within the people in response to the prophet. The tax agents and sinners represent the outcast and the poor who respond positively. They not only eat with Jesus, they approach to ‘hear’ the prophet. They are becoming part of the people. The Pharisees and scribes (or lawyers) represent those who are powerful and ‘rich’ who reject the prophet’s call. . . Now, in response to the complaint of the leaders concerning the accessibility of the prophet to these ‘lost ones,’ Luke has Jesus tell three stories.” (LTJ,239)
- 15:1 “Note also that Jesus is **not** searching for and seeking the lost. The tax collectors and sinners are coming to him -- to hear him -- exactly what Jesus asked for in the verse just before this text: ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’ (14:35b). Jesus seems to **invite** them to **eat** with him. (Hmmm -- sounds like word and sacrament stuff again.) ‘Eating with’ (*synesthio*) seems to have been a problem in the early church. Peter is criticized for eating with Gentiles (Acts 11:3), but not for baptizing them!” (BPS)

- “Tax collectors and sinners’ is a social category for people outside the law, and therefore unrighteous.” (JS, 257)
- “Tax collectors and sinners did not come to hear Pharisees and scribes, because they knew that they would find only judgment. They come to hear Jesus, because they sense that he accepts them — is JOYFUL at their coming.” (L)
- 15:2-3 “As Luke tells it, Jesus is attracting these ne'er-do-wells in droves and driving the respectable religious authorities a little bonkers, and so he tells them -- both groups, apparently -- a couple of parables.” (Lose, WP)
- 15:2 “Pharisees and scribes’ is a social category for those inside the law, and therefore righteous. The righteous are complaining about Jesus’ association with the unrighteous. They characterize it as ‘welcoming sinners and eating with them.’ This is code for approving of their unrighteousness.” (JS, 257)
 - “The Pharisees and scribes in the introduction will not rejoice with Jesus over the sinners with whom he eats, instead they grumble (*diagogguzo*). The same word is used of the people's reaction when Jesus goes to Zacchaeus' house – ‘to be the guest of one who is a sinner’ (19:7 -- this is the only occurrence of the word in the NT). A closely related word (*gogguzo*) is used of the Pharisees and scribes **complaining** when Jesus has gone to Levi's house and eats with sinners and tax collectors (5:30). All of the ‘complaining’ in Luke are about Jesus' table-fellowship.” (BPS)
 - “Verse 2b summarizes the problem Jesus presents for the Pharisees and legal experts, according to Luke, for it is at the table that his (from their perspective) lack of sensitivity regarding accepted norms and his neglect of the law of God come into incontrovertible expression. The importance of the table as an instrument for drawing and maintaining socio-religious boundaries, from the perspective of Jesus' adversaries, has been repeatedly ignored by Jesus. Indeed in the present instance, not only is he blamed for eating with ‘sinners’ -- that is, at their invitation, as in 5:29 -- but apparently for extending hospitality to them as well. Jesus thus behaves toward these outsiders, these unclean, contemptible persons of ignoble status, as though they were acceptable, as though they were his own kin. [p. 571]” (J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, in BPS)
 - “We hope it is Party Sunday in your church. Party Sunday is the day of Eucharist! ‘Join me at my table,’ the God of Jesus says. ‘Join me at this mealtime-party. Let us eat and celebrate. This is still the place on earth that I ‘welcome sinners and eat with them’ [p. 170]” (Jensen in BPS)
- 15:2a “Their grumbling stems from the fact that Jesus offers table fellowship to known sinners — conferring dignity and acceptance on the undignified and unacceptable.” (L)
- 15:2b “...because table fellowship implies a certain familiarity, even intimacy. And the folks Jesus is eating with are the lowest of the low: tax collectors, the turncoat locals who make their living squeezing their neighbors on behalf of the Roman Empire, and sinners, a name reserved for those whose lifestyle has put them beyond the bounds of moral society.” (DL)
 - “If this is only a story about good Jesus versus bad Pharisees, it loses force. It is, instead, a story about good men whose preoccupation with ritual observance has blinded them to their own sin.” (L)

Reflection Question:

- “What about our church potlucks? Do we ever think of inviting the neighborhood, or homeless people to our potluck suppers? There's always more food than the members can eat. However, do we really want to eat with ‘them?’” (BPS)
 - How do you feel about inviting the “homeless” to potlucks at your church? What about inviting them to your home to eat with you? What do you think Jesus would say about your answers to these questions?

Day 3

Luke 15:3-7

³So he told them this parable: ⁴“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? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And 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.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Background:

- 3-7//8-10 The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin can be virtually superimposed on the same outline.

Which man/woman ... having 100 sheep/10 coins, if he/she loses one ... does not leave/sweep ... and go after/and seek ... until he/she finds it? And when he/she has found it ... he/she calls together his/her friends and neighbors saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep/the coin ... which was/I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more/is joy in heaven/before the angels of God over one sinner who repents ...’

In both cases, however, the parable itself seems to have a different thrust from its application, which begins **Just so I tell you**. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that both parables primarily convey images of the determined concern of God to find the lost while the conclusions draw more attention to the necessity of repentance as the occasion of returning or being **found**...

The glory of both parables lies in their astonishing picture of God or God’s way of ruling. This shepherd and woman are the central figures of both stories. What they do and say conveys the drama, not the wayward sheep or lost coin. They are images of determination, perhaps even obsession with the lost. Many scriptural precedents exist for speaking of God as the shepherd of Israel and even as the faithful shepherd who seeks and restores the lost (Ezek. 34:11-16; Jer. 31:10-14; Isa. 40:11).

But this shepherd and woman are not merely examples of virtue. It may even be possible to question why the shepherd put the 99 at risk by leaving them **in the wilderness**. And why does the **woman** make such a large scene over the loss of an insignificant **coin**? And why do they call in their men and women **friends** for a celebration? ...

These parables are glimpses into the heart of God. They are drawn from human experience; but experience in which determination, extravagance, and joy exceed normal practice. A shepherd who is obsessed with finding that one lost sheep may take inordinate risks, and a woman who loses a coin may take her house apart knowing that it ‘has to be here.’ And so it is with God, and God’s Messiah acting in obedience to God’s will. The determination, the risky behavior of eating with sinners and tax collectors, and the extravagant **joy of heaven** put the moralists and religionists on edge and to shame.

The conclusions (vv. 7, 10) sound the note of joy which the parables already imply, but they also indicate that God finding the ‘lost’ person is more complex than a shepherd finding **a sheep** or a woman **a coin**. After all, both the sheep and the coin are not responsible or willful agents. No suggestion is made that the sheep (or the coin) was ‘bad.’ But it is probably Luke who has introduced the mention of **repentance**, and Luke’s conviction is that the image of the parable must be elaborated if the force of this parable is to be caught within this larger story of the revelation of God’s will and the disclosure of human rejection.

Yes, God’s passion and compassion is to save, even at great risk and with displays of determination. That is why Jesus ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem’ (9:51) and why his priority has been not to call ‘the righteous’ but ‘sinners’ to repentance (5:31)...

In Luke’s presentation, **repentance** is not a good work (see 15:30). Repentance is itself a gift from God for Israel and later for the Gentiles (Acts 5:31, 11:18). God, the Messiah, and

the Holy Spirit are of one will and one dominion in seeking to find the lost and lead sinners to repentance. But committed and compassionate as God's will is, it is not coercive. It always requires the hearing of faith. Thus repentance is a miracle of God's tireless grace and of faith, and the courts of heaven rollick with joy when this mission is accomplished and one sinner repents. It is not simple, even for God." (DT, 274-276)

- "Why is Jesus so sure that what the shepherd and the woman are doing is universal behavior? Both one hundred and ten are symbolic numbers. They connote wholeness, completeness, fullness. There is a drive in each person for wholeness on every level. We want physical, psychological, social and spiritual completeness. The story of the shepherd and the woman are about social completeness which, when it happens, also triggers a spiritual wholeness, an integration of heaven and earth. Israel is split into two camps—tax collectors/sinners and righteous. They must become one people, the one people under the covenant of the one God. So the shepherd seeks the one sheep to add him to the ninety-nine; and the woman seeks the one coin to add it to the nine. In this way a divided people become whole.

This drive to find the missing one...represents an alignment between God and creation. God desires this reconciled unity." (JS, 258)

- "Culpepper (*Luke*, New Interpreter's Bible) ends his commentary on this text with: In both parables, rejoicing calls for celebration, and the note of celebration may be exaggerated to emphasize the point. Neither sheep nor coins can repent, but the parable aims not at calling the 'sinners' to repentance but at calling the 'righteous' to join the celebration. Whether one will join the celebration is all-important because it reveals whether one's relationships are based on merit or mercy. Those who find God's mercy offensive cannot celebrate with the angels when a sinner repents. Thus they exclude themselves from God's grace [p. 298]." (BPS)
- 15:3-10...In effect, Jesus' table fellowship practices mirror the joy and festivity characteristic of God, in contrast to the grumbling of the Pharisees and legal experts (v. 1-2)." (NISB, 1883)
- 15:4-7 "...be careful -- we're so eager to read parables as puzzles that it's easy to miss the ridiculous, almost biting irony in each one. Because when Jesus says 'which one of you...' and then goes on to paint a scenario, most of us take him at face-value. But think about it. Which one of us, quite honestly, if we had a hundred sheep and lost one, would put the other ninety-nine *at risk* to search for the stray? Because that's what Jesus is really asking. We assume he means that we put the ninety-nine into a nice, clean sheep pen first and then go out looking. But Jesus says, which one of you wouldn't leave them *in the wilderness* -- you know, where they could go astray themselves or become the prey of wolves ... Framed that way, the answer to Jesus' question is, 'nobody.' Nobody, that is, is quite that stupid, or reckless, or foolhardy to leave ninety-nine perfectly intact sheep to go after the one stray. No. You cut your losses and move on. That's what a shepherd with any sense would do, at least." (Lose, WP)
- 15:4 **Which one of you:** "No reasonable shepherd would have left 99 sheep to go find one. Note that the untended sheep were left in the 'wilderness' not in some protected enclosure. However, the analogy can be made that the shepherd is willing to risk losing everything for the sake of the one. It could also imply that God, as the shepherd, often acts in unreasonable ways. Perhaps this relates to 'hating' family members. The things that are most dear to us are what we have to give up to gain what is most important." (BPS)
 - "'Which one among you?' invites the audience into the story." (Carey,WP)
- 15:4 "Note that the verb here has to do not with forgiving but with finding. The Greek word for 'find' (eurisko) occurs seven times in the chapter. When the sheep or lost coin is found, no comment is made on any sinful behavior (as in the stories of Levi, Zaccheus, and the sinful woman), but a connection is made between (a) God's finding and rejoicing over what was lost and (b) 'the one sinner who repents' (15:7; 10)." (Malcolm, WP)

- 15:7 “Unlike the English word *repentance*, which implies contrition and remorse, the Greek word *metanoia* has to do with a change of mind and purpose -- a shift in how we perceive and respond to life. When God finds us when we are lost, our usual ways of perceiving and responding to life are transformed.” (Malcolm, WP)
- 15:7 “This kind of ridiculous celebration is what characterizes God’s response to sinners who repent. . . repentance may include a mending of one’s ways and moral reform, but the chief characteristic is a turning around, a change in perspective, a recognition, to bring us full circle, of being lost and a corresponding desire to turn around and be found.” (Lose, *Dear WP*)

Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever strayed from the Christian faith or from being a part of a church and church community? If yes, what did God use to bring you back? Journal
- Will the friends and neighbors of the shepherd rejoice with him? Would you rejoice with the shepherd? Would you rejoice with God over finding a lost sinner? Journal.

Day 4

Luke 15:8-10

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? ⁹When 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.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Background:

- 15:8-10 “**10 silver coins:** These coins are drachmas, each worth about one day’s wage. Even if these are the only coins she has, could a woman in the ancient world set aside all other tasks to look for one lost coin? The answer is ‘no.’ This woman will do anything to find one lost coin.” (LSB, 1731)
- 15:8-10 “This parable, unique to Luke, I think was included to present a female searcher in connection with the male shepherd. Such a male/female pattern often occurs in Luke.”
- 15:8-10 “Now consider the second parable. This one makes a little more sense at first: if you had only ten coins and lost one, you’d search, too, sweeping and sweeping until you find it. But once you found it, would you really call your friends and invite them to rejoice? After all, you don’t invite neighbors over to rejoice -- that is, celebrate -- without hosting them for a meal. So, let’s try that again: which one of you would search all night for your silver coin and then spend probably twice that much in celebrating your find with your friends? Again, nobody! At least nobody with any sense.” (Lose, WP)
- 15:7 and 10 “A present participle generally denotes action that occurs at the same time as the main verb. The main verb in the first conclusion (v. 7) is *estai* a future = ‘There will be.’ The main verb in the second conclusion (v. 10) is *isginetai* a present = ‘There is.’ So, when a sinner repents, at that moment there is joy in heaven. Will there be joy on earth, then seems to be Jesus’ question” (BPS)
 - “I don’t think that Jesus’ main point is about joy in heaven, but joy on earth. The joy in heaven is a given. It is the corresponding joy on earth that can be nearly impossible to attain. The self-righteous, critical, judgmental attitude of the scribes and Pharisees sought to kill the joy of Jesus’ parties. I guess that when they couldn’t kill the joy of the party, they killed the party-host -- which stopped the joy for only a short three days. Then we again see Jesus eating with sinners. The ‘party’ goes on.” (BPS)

- 15:10 “REDEFINED REPENTANCE

Although both of our parables end with a statement about repentance, that can't be the main point of these parables. The idea of a sheep repenting is only slightly less absurd than the idea of a coin repenting! In addition, there is nothing to indicate that the sheep was 'bad' or that the coin was 'sinful' and that they needed repentance.

However, Dick Jensen (*Preaching Luke's Gospel*) shares a new definition of 'repentance' from Kenneth Bailey (*Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15*): 'The only possible action in this story which could constitute repentance is the finding of the lost. Repentance, therefore, may be defined as our acceptance of being found.' Later Jensen briefly expounds on this: 'Repentance is our acceptance of the reality that God has found us in Jesus Christ. This means, of course, that we acknowledge our own 'lostness.'" [p. 169]

In notes from Bailey that I received through another e-mail from someone who heard him at a conference, there is this further statement: 'The sheep does nothing except to be found. The burden of restoration is not on the sheep but on the shepherd who went looking for the lamb.' And, 'The lover comes out in the costly demonstration of unexpected love, and we stop running away, and we accept that offer of love and in that acceptance is Jesus' definition of repentance.' [notes from the Professional Leaders Conference of the Northern Illinois Synod, September, 1994]" (BPS)

- "Tannehill (*Luke*) seems to share this thought when he writes: 'Repentance is more an experience of being found by a concerned seeker than the product of human effort. And its public sign is joy at the gift of new life rather than doleful remorse.' [p. 238]" (BPS)
- "At issue here are two different *types of responses* to Jesus and God's reign. Sinners *repent* because they know they are *lost* and thus can avail themselves of the transformation that comes with God's *finding* them. By contrast, the righteous do not need to repent (or change their ways) presumably because they don't think they are lost. They don't need God to find them; they are justified either in their own eyes or in the eyes of others (16:15; cf. 10:29; 18:14)." (Malcolm, WP)

Reflection Questions:

- Notice how Jesus slows down the story, giving the hearers a more detailed account of what the woman does to look for her lost coin. Why do you think Jesus (or Luke) does this? Can you relate to her experience? What effects do these details/slowing down have in bringing this story into your life? Journal.
- Will the friends and neighbors of the woman rejoice with her? Would you rejoice with the woman? Would you rejoice with God over finding a lost sinner? Journal.

Day 5

Reread the entire Scripture:

- Does anything significant or new stand out for you with this reading?
- After studying and meditating on this Scripture, what do you think God might be saying to you?

Reread the entire Scripture again.

- What prayer rises up in you (what would you like to say to God) after reflecting (listening to what God had to say to you) on this Scripture?

Reflection questions:

- "Even before we get to the stories that attract our interest we are confronted with two questions. First, why were the tax collectors and sinners attracted to Jesus? Second, why did the fact of their attraction seem so offensive to the Pharisees and scribes? Or to put it in

contemporary terms, what would the church have to do to be attractive to the sinners of our day and would such behavior seem offensive to the leaders of our churches?" (SPMc, 266)

- How do you answer these questions? Journal.
- "Concerning both parables: On one hand: God is concerned about that which we might think is trivial (one sheep, one coin). Who are the often over-looked, trivialized people in our society? We know that God cares for them, but do we? How do we show it?" (BPS)
 - Who do you think are "the over-looked, trivialized people" today? In Chico? Do we individually and as a faith community care about these people? If yes, how do we show our care?
- "The chapter begins with a contrast between 'tax collectors and sinners' and 'Pharisees and scribes.' Apparently, sinners are drawn to Jesus, but religious leaders complain that he accepts and even eats with sinners (15:1-2). What is it about Jesus and what he does that elicits such different responses?" (Lois Malcolm, WP)

From Greg Carey, WP

"Congregations may stumble over the term sinner, especially if they are well educated in Christian doctrine. 'Aren't we all sinners?' some may protest. Not in Luke's world. In Luke's world, some people so habitually transgress the ways of God that they are sinners in need of repentance. Others do not. We must take our passage on its own terms: Jesus distinguishes between sinners who repent and 'the righteous who have no need of repentance' (15:7). We may struggle with that distinction, but it is critical for engaging this passage on its own terms. Here lies the cutting edge of the passage: Jesus embraces the very people the rest of religious society rejects.

Preachers, then, face the task of helping their congregations imagine what it is to welcome 'sinners.' ... our society does name its losers, and the church's task is to take sides with the underdogs. Do we have the courage, first, to speak out loud who are the 'sinners' in our cultural moment, and, second, to take sides with them? Politicians and demagogues are constantly scapegoating people as 'sinners' who place an undue burden on the rest of society. As we move from one public debate to another, 'sinners' includes undocumented immigrants, but apparently does not include respectable people who prevent group homes from entering their neighborhoods and people who conduct business in predatory ways. Eating with sinners means taking sides."

- Who do you see society naming as "sinners" of today?
- How do we, individually and as a community, "eat with sinners"...how do we welcome them?

Carey concludes with: "Finally, let us attend to the role of meals. If we take on the risk of naming today's "sinners" and then welcoming them, words alone do not suffice. There is the matter of setting a table -- literally, not figuratively. Table fellowship reveals the boundaries of human relationships."

More from Greg Carey, WP

"As with most of Jesus' parables, there is a 'hook,' something that seems out of place. That hook lies in a certain lavishness in the celebrations. In the ancient world, 'rejoicing' implies eating. Would a shepherd really throw a party over the finding of a lost sheep? ('Which one of you' does not do so?) If the lost coin so concerns the woman, are we to expect her to endure the expense of a party? ('What woman' would not?) As with most parables, this 'hook' provides rich material for reflection. It invites us to recognize the extravagant joy with which God, present in Christ, welcomes sinners."

From David Lose, WP, in his *Dear Working Preacher* on this Gospel

"... When it comes to God's children -- God's lost, confused, hurting children -- God has no sense. God would risk everything to find one of them -- one of us! -- and having found a lost and beloved child -- give everything again to celebrate. There's only one kind of word for this behavior -- desperate. That's right. God is desperate for us, desperate to find us, desperate to redeem us, desperate to draw us back into God's abiding, abundant love.

There's a saying about parenthood that I've always found incredibly, and sometimes painfully, true: a parent is only as happy as his/her least happy child. Now think about this in relation to God our heavenly parent. No wonder Jesus says there is more joy in heaven when a single sinner repents than ninety-nine of the righteous. The more lost a person is, the greater cause for celebration when that one is found...

And so God comes in Jesus searching for all of God's lost children, and inviting those of us that have been found to do the same. Because when you're lost, at least according to this parable, there's not much you can do. Jesus doesn't set out a formula about repenting first, or set down four spiritual rules, or even compose a 'sinner's prayer' for us to recite. I suppose Jesus figures that often you don't even know you're lost in the first place.

But you do know when you've been found. Sometimes, in fact, it's only when you're found that you realize you were lost at all. Which means, oddly, that while there's nothing to do when you're lost, there's all kinds of things to do once you've been found: like tell, share, shout, give thanks -- in a word, *rejoice*. The primary character of the Christian life, from this point of view, isn't morality, or repentance, or discipline, or obedience, or any of the other hundred things we might suspect. These things are all good, just not primary. What seems to be primary here is joy, the joy that comes from knowing that though you once were lost, you now are found.

I think that's what the Pharisees forgot -- how incredibly, unbelievably joyful it is to be sought, found, and loved by a devoted, desperate parent. They remember the importance of obedience, discipline, morality and the like, but they forget the joy of being found.

... it's easy to forget amid the hustle and bustle of this life that what I'm called primarily to do is rejoice -- for my being found, for your being found, and for the promise that God is still desperately searching, sweeping, and looking for God's lost and beloved children and won't quit until we're all found."

By Pastor Brian Stoffregen

"We are often too concerned about possessions and money; when we should be more concerned about people -- especially about bringing them into the kingdom. How many hours in council or session or board meetings are spent talking about reaching the 'lost' or 'unchurched' as compared to discussions about the church property or finances or trying to win back lapsed members? How often are such meetings celebrations of lost being found, sinners repenting?

These parables present one model of evangelism -- going out to where the 'lost' are located. However, the introduction (vv. 1-3) and third parable (vv. 15-33) [the lost son] present another model - providing a hospitable place where the 'lost' can come and be welcomed (and fed). There is no 'searching' in these verses."

So, what do you think about celebrating the "lost being found, sinners repenting" at your church's meetings? Do we individually and as a faith community "provide a hospitable place where the lost can come and be welcomed (and fed)?"

“Fred Danker in *Jesus and the New Age* writes some challenging things about this passage: Against so much that is drab in religion, Jesus depicts the happy laughter of a Father who invites the angels to the homecoming festival. Somber, morbid religiosity has no place in the Kingdom. Dancing, the blowing of trumpets, beating of drums is a legitimate part of the church's worship (cf. 2 Samuel 6:5). The cult of respectability must give way to the cultivation of the art of joy over God's delight in reclaiming the refuse of humanity. In worship the Shepherd is congratulated, not the sheep. God does not commend the righteous for remaining righteous (vs. 7), and Jesus has not come to compliment them for what they ought to be in the first place. Nor has he criticized their standards. Their position is not made less secure by Jesus' outreach to publicans and sinners. All he expects of them is that they share his joy over the return of the lost. [page 169]” (As quoted in commentary by BPS)

Psalm 51:1-10

**Trust in God for Deliverance from Enemies.
To the leader: for the flutes. A Psalm of David.**

- ¹ Give ear to my words, O LORD;
give heed to my sighing.
- ² Listen to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
- ³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
- ⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil will not sojourn with you.
- ⁵ The boastful will not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.
- ⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
- ⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house,
I will bow down towards your holy temple
in awe of you.
- ⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.
- ⁹ For there is no truth in their mouths;
their hearts are destruction;
their throats are open graves;
they flatter with their tongues.
- ¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.