

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

And He Eats With Them

Sermon Reflection Notes

In Luke 15, we enter a part of Luke's Gospel heavily sprinkled with parables, most of them without parallels in Matthew and Mark. Often those parables shared with Matthew and Mark are drawn from nature. The parables unique to Luke's Gospel are more related to human activity and to human relationships. Luke 15 includes a trilogy of stories – one about a lost sheep, one about a lost coin, and finally one about a lost son. Only the parable of the lost sheep has a parallel in Matthew 18.

The context of the parables is that Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners. In other words, Jesus shares table fellowship and breaks bread with tax collectors and sinners. To eat with outsiders is a sign of full acceptance. To the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus' behavior surely was inappropriate, disruptive, and totally against the purpose of true religion. Jesus turns the challenge back to the teachings of the Torah: should I follow the laws or should I follow the scriptures that say 'love thy neighbor'? To answer the question, Jesus tells stories. But he tells them in a subversive manner. Jesus spotlights the shepherd and the woman (the outcasts) in the parables; in fact, he casts them in the role of God.

Pastor Andy said the Baptist version of this parable, which is one we are likely familiar with, is that Jesus is calling us to go and seek the lost, to go save the lost and bring them back to God. And saving is good, and healing, and helpful. But saving is not the same as welcoming.

This parable has layers, and we need to look deeper than the surface. Who did Jesus intend the Pharisees to see as the 99 versus the 1? Who is the lost 'coin'? Who is the 'outsider'? The reality is that when we bring the 'outsiders' to the table, we may feel uncomfortable or even threatened; we have an intrinsic drive to protect what is our place, our sense of belonging. You could say we have a problem defining who is 'in' versus who is 'out' because that distinction *always* leaves someone out. And we don't like to think of ourselves as being part of the lost or the outsiders.

Jesus suggests that God leaves the flock, the 99, in the wilderness to seek out the 1, not because the 99 were safe and happy and just fine; God seeks the 1, God risks the entire flock, because the flock is not complete without that 'lost' sheep.

Jesus reminds the Pharisees that although they have been following the Torah and living their lives to the best of their ability, trying to do the right things, they have also missed something. They still see 'others' as lost, but not themselves as lost too. Perhaps the message is that we have to change ourselves, not others. We have to step back and ask ourselves: "What do I really want? What do I want to be true about me every single day?" And then, we have to ask ourselves an even harder question: "Are my words and actions working to bring that about?"

Because in the kingdom of God, it is *never* too late for anyone. Never. Therefore, "*Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of this world. All things break. And all things can be*

mended. Not with time, as the saying goes, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you." (LR Knost)

Scripture

Luke 15:1-10 (NRSVUE)

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

³ So 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? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ Just 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? ⁹ And 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.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Discussion Questions

1. This is a really familiar parable, particularly the shepherd and lost sheep part. Pastor Andy said the "Baptist" version tells the story as a command to go and seek and save the lost. That is the version told in many faith traditions. Who are some of the 'lost souls' that Christians have sought to save? What methods were used and were they in line with the Gospel of Christ?
2. Pastor Andy also said that while saving is good and healing, it is not the same as welcoming. He said saving has power and welcoming has intimacy. What do those comments make you think about? What do you see as the difference between 'saving' and 'welcoming'?
3. The scripture clearly says that someone "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..." It says 'in the wilderness' (or the equivalent of wilderness) in all the Bible versions we checked. How does calling attention to that phrase change our understanding of God running after us when we wander away? How does it change our understanding of the ninety-nine left behind?
4. At the heart of the sermon, we were asked to reflect on our own motives. Pastor Andy gave us these questions: What do I really want? What do I want to be true about me every single day? Are my words and actions working to bring that about?
 - How can these questions help us Love God and Love Neighbor? What do they require us to do and why?
5. What changes in us and the world if we really believe it is never too late for anyone to be welcomed at God's table?

Closing Prayer

Holy and grace filled God, we have been asked the question "What do I really want?" And the answer, all too often, reveals that we want to be right, we want to save our neighbors, and we want to fix the world. And yet, Jesus calls us to welcome the person we most want to fix, to break bread with the people we would like to save, and to listen to the person we deem to be so wrong headed. So, in the coming days, help us to hold a mirror to our own lives, soften our hearts to those we do not like, and plant the seeds of Jesus' mind into our own thinking. Thank you for the people around us who help us to better see and hear Jesus' words to us. In His name we pray. Amen.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!"