

Sermon September 11, 2022 Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, 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, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 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. Luke 15:1-7

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is Rally Day – the official fall kick-off of our educational programs here at Christ Lutheran. Today Luke gives us a perfect teaching of Jesus that speaks to the importance of hearing the Word of God and keeping it.

Over the summer Luke has invited us to join the group in Palestine that is travelling with Jesus as he makes his way toward Jerusalem for the last time. This group consists of two very different kinds of people.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the Scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

First off, Luke writes there are tax collectors and sinners among those following Jesus. Then he adds that there were also Pharisees and Scribes. These are two very different cross sections of people! As they travelled along, the Pharisees would be taking their dinners at something like a Ruth Chris steak house. The others at an Eat n Park or McDonalds. The Pharisees had reservations at the Marriot. The sinners at a Motel 6. You get the picture.

But the most important distinction between these two, of course, is what is in their hearts. Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collectors and sinners had responded to

the preaching of John the Baptist. Now they turned to Jesus in repentance and faith. Luke says the Pharisees on the other hand grumbled that the so-called Messiah would even associate with such common rabble.

In the telling of the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus continues to welcome sinners and warn Scribes and Pharisees of the hardness of their hearts.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?”

Jesus asks the hearers to imagine themselves as shepherds. The sinners following Jesus may find that a little hard to picture. However, it was much more natural for the Scribes to see themselves as shepherds. They were religious leaders among the people. Jesus is speaking to both groups. If a sheep gets lost, it is assumed that all the shepherds except one stay with the rest of the flock. The one unlucky shepherd who drew the short straw has to go out, search, and hopefully find the lost animal. In the meantime, the day gets late and the other shepherds return to the village with the flock.

5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

Good news! What was lost is now found. There are two important lessons Jesus weaves into his parable. First, it says the shepherd carries the sheep back to the village. Why? Real-life shepherds tell us that when a sheep gets lost it lays down and will refuse to budge. It's not like when you are in the woods with your dog. You get separated. Upon finding the dog she happily jumps up, licks you in the face, and follows you back to the truck. Not so much with the sheep! A lost sheep drops to the ground and becomes dead weight. You have to carry it back to the fold. Here Jesus compares us to the sheep. As the Word of God says, “We all like sheep have gone astray.” We are helpless to find our way back home. Lucky for us, Jesus says he has, “Come to seek and to save the lost.”

It doesn't take much to see Jesus as the searching shepherd in the story. While the would-be shepherds among the Scribes and Pharisees are happy to leave the tax collectors and sinners out in the wilderness, Jesus is the one who takes the responsibility to seek and to save. Instead of carrying a lost, motionless sheep,

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, through the streets of Jerusalem, upon his shoulders, carried the wood of the cross.

It is also pointed out that the sheep-laden shepherd returns to the village with JOY. This reminds us of what the Word of God in the book of Hebrews says about Jesus,

...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who carried the cross in joy, knowing that through his suffering he would save the lost, that he would save us.

6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

Here the parable mentions joy for the second time. This is the overall point of the parable. In the introduction to the parable, Luke noted that the Scribes and Pharisees grumbled that Jesus received sinners and ate with them. In reality, the Good Shepherd and all of heaven are, in fact, doing just the opposite. They are rejoicing!

The theme that runs through all of this material in this section of Luke’s Gospel is that the true nature of the Kingdom of God is one of a joyful feast of celebration. Today we may share such joys as this with a phone call, card, or a post to Facebook or Instagram. In first century Palestine however, such joy was always celebrated in person, with others, at a meal, around a table. When the shepherd returns with the lost sheep there is such a meal of celebration. When the woman in the next parable finds the lost valuable coin, she invites her neighbors to a joyful meal of celebration. When the prodigal son returns home, the fatted calf is killed, and the village comes together for a joyful feast.

Jesus pictures heaven for us as an end-time, never-ending banquet celebrated with joy. We all like sheep have gone astray. We were helpless and frozen in our sin. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, carried the burden of our salvation upon his shoulders in the cross. Now he welcomes us back into the fold. He even invites us

to join in the joy of heaven over sinners who repent in the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom which has no end. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.
Amen.**

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