

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: February 2, 2014
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“TO FIND AND BE FOUND”

Luke 15:1-32

This morning we celebrate Holy Communion.

❓ *Why do we keep coming back to the table?*

○ {Lk 22:18} Do we come... on account of social obligation, to gratify the expectations of pastor and pewmate? ...By reason of tradition, to align ourselves with the customs of the Church? ...Merely out of duty, to fulfill Christ's command to **“do this in remembrance of me”**?

Or, *do we come to seek and be sought, to find and be found, because without Jesus we are lost?*

□ Please turn with me to Luke 15. The chapter records three parables.

■ The parable of The Lost Sheep is in verses 4-7.

A man has one hundred sheep but one goes missing. So he leaves the ninety-nine, goes out and finds the lost sheep, and **“joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”**

“In the same way,” declares Jesus, **“there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”**

■ The parable of The Lost Coin is in verses 8-10.

A woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She makes a thorough search of her house **“until she finds**

it[.] **And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.”**

“In the same way,” declares Jesus, **“there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

■ The parable of **the Lost Sons** starts in **v 11**.

The younger of two sons demands his inheritance, and his father agrees to his request. The kid's goal is to put as much geographical and personal distance between himself and his old man as he possibly can. He moves to a far-off country, and sets out to do break every rule he has been taught.

Wild living isn't cheap, and before long the kid is broke. At about the same time, that whole country is plunged into “severe famine.” The only job available to an immature, unconnected foreigner is tending pigs.

It is a dirty, low-paying, degrading job. Not even the pagans think of it as “good, honest work” – and this kid is Jewish. All his life he has heard that anyone who has contact with swine is as unclean as a gutter sinner. He is so lost, he takes the job anyway.

But herding swine does not pay a living wage. Not only so, the kid's boss is so stingy he refuses to let him eat some of the pig feed.

None of this had to happen. It is the kid's fault, and he knows it. For a first century Jew to demand his inheritance from his living father is to say, “I wish you were dead so I could have your money.” To move unnecessarily to a Gentile country is to repudiate nation, family, and God. To live wildly is to reject

biblical Law. To feed pigs is to violate tradition and sacrifice one's last shred of dignity.

Naturally, the kid is afraid that his father will turn him away, saying, "I had a son your age – but he is dead," or that his father will make him pay dearly for his depravity and stupidity. Still, he can risk judgment or die alone on foreign soil and be tossed in an unmarked grave. Those are the only choices left to him.

Starvation brings the kid **"to his senses."** He decides to go back to his father, confess his sin, and beg for menial work as a servant.

To the prodigal's surprise his father runs to him (something Jewish men don't do!), throws his arms around him (despite the stench and caked-on filth), and kisses him (not knowing what he has eaten). He restores his child to a place honor and instructs a servant to **"Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."**

■ Back to verses 25-32: The older son hears music and dancing. When he asks what's going on, a servant replies: **"Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound."**

Now *maybe* he could stand it if Dad took little brother on as a servant and always assigned him the hardest, scummiest jobs. *Maybe!* *Maybe* he could stomach it if Dad let little brother back into the house, then made every day a living hell of accusation, blame, and reproach. Just *maybe*.

But to throw a feast for the brat?! That sticks in his craw, and he refuses to join the party.

When his father comes out and pleads with him, the firstborn's tone turns nasty: **"Look! All these years I've been *slaving* for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when *this son of yours* who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"**

This elder brother is envious, bitter, disrespectful, and merciless. Above all, he is proud: so proud of his goodness, so proud of his obedience, so proud of his hard work. He is not about to break bread with the prodigal! His heart is equally distant from his brother and his father.

His father is gracious: **"My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad... this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."**

? I began this message by asking why we keep coming to the table. *What is the connection?*

■ Luke 15:1-3: **"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' Then Jesus told them this parable"** of the Lost Sheep which connects seamlessly with the one about the Lost Coin, which flows right into the one about the Lost Sons.

Why are so they troubled about this?

First, these Pharisees and teachers fixate on social honor and shame.

As a group, they are driven to achieve prestige and avoid disgrace. Respect is their fondest dream, humiliation their worst nightmare. They go to extreme lengths to polish and protect their reputations.

☑ {Snodgrass} **“Shared meals [are] the primary context in which honor and shame are assigned.”** Eat with the right people and public honor is secured; eat with the wrong ones and public shame is assured!

Jesus eats with everyone. He gives the distinct impression that, to him, social reputation is irrelevant; what matters is redemptive relationships that glorify God and edify the shameful. That is why he eats with sinners at their tables.

We have been as lost as that sheep, that coin, that younger son and his older brother. Each of us needs Messiah to redeem us. That is why we keep coming back to his table: to seek and be sought, to find and be found, for without him we are lost in false honor and real shame.

Second, these Pharisees and teachers obsess over impurity and sin, and they consider both to be highly contagious.

📖 Impurity is bodily defilement by objects and processes that make a person unfit for social interaction and worship. Sin is all in attitude, thought, word and deed that is contrary to the will of God.

Christ’s opponents think of impurity and sin as diseases transmitted through human contact. They

assume that they are righteous, and that the best way to stay righteous is by avoiding sinners like the plague.

Jesus seldom talks about impurity. He strongly condemns sin and calls sinners to repentance. He acts as though holiness is highly contagious and the way for sinners to be saved from sin is through relationship with him, the Righteous One! That is why he eats with sinners at their tables.

We have been as lost as that sheep, that coin, that younger son and his older brother. Each of us needs Messiah to save us. That is why we keep coming back to his table: to seek and be sought, to find and be found, for without him we are lost in the guilt and power of sin.

One of the best things about being found by the Lord Jesus is that when he finds us (whether here at his table, or anywhere else) he does not devalue or shame or disown us for getting lost – he joyfully honors us, restores us, and embraces us in merciful, compassionate love! He throws a party, and all heaven celebrates with him!

So let’s not come like the Pharisees, on account of social obligation to gratify human expectations.

Let’s not come like the Pharisees, by reason of tradition to align ourselves with the customs of the Church.

Let’s not come like the Pharisees, merely out of duty to fulfill Christ’s command to **“do this in remembrance of me.”**

Let us come to the Table to seek and be sought, to find and be found. Without Jesus we are lost!