

MARCH 27, 2022-THE PRODIGAL SON
Our Gospel comes from Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Today, we're in the Gospel of Luke, often referred to as the Gospel of Mercy.

I love Luke and of late I have begun to look at this Gospel as a commentary of the fifth book of the Bible, 2nd law, Deuteronomy.

And today, we're gonna see why, as we consider the Prodigal Son, which is part of a trifecta of grace that serves as the cornerstone of Luke's Gospel.

The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son.

These three parables are very much connected.

Can't really talk about the Prodigal Son without first considering the parables that proceed it.

Now, of course through the years, we've heard this story, Prodigal Son, many, many times, one of the greatest of Gospels only found in Luke, also known as the Running Father or Defacing Father [the one who is stepping out of the way so the brothers can be united].

Certainly love this Gospel, and I imagine many others do.

And through the years, we've been told a thousand different ways, that it is we who are the Lost Sheep, it is we who are the Lost Coin, and it is we who are the Prodigal Son.

And of course, that is true, but that is the hallmark-ification of this Gospel because there's a whole lot more here.

Sometimes we're the father, sometimes we're the older brother.

It's like a diamond with a whole lot of cuts, so let's go, it's a deep pool.

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and the Scribes began to complain saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

This man welcomed sinners.

I imagine when Jesus first heard that, He probably smiled a little bit.

Yeah, this man welcomed sinners. Yes, I do.

Thank God for that.

Gives people like you and me some hope, but of course, the Pharisees and the Scribes are complaining because Jesus, who is truth, does not fit with their truth.

And what do you do when you don't like the truth?

Well, you attack the messenger.

And they do.

So, to them, Jesus says, "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them will not leave the 99 in the desert and go after the one until they find it?"

And I'll tell you the answer to that is nobody.

Nobody's gonna do that.

I mean, think about it.

First of all, a hundred sheep, that's a lot of sheep.

Very few people in the ancient world would actually own a hundred sheep.

It's a huge amount.

Maybe some of the Pharisees he's talking to might, but most people don't own that kind of sheep.

But if you did own a hundred sheep, you certainly wouldn't be the one out there looking after 'em because that's the job of a peasant.

Somebody is paid to watch over the sheep, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

And if that poor guy who's getting paid to watch the animals were to leave 99 sheep out in the wilderness, completely defenseless, to go after one stupid lost sheep, and you own that flock, you're gonna fire that guy.

Pick up your check.

You are so outta here.

I mean, I could just hear it now.

Really?

So, you left the entire flock to chase after one sheep? What if 30 had run off?

What if somebody backed up a truck and stole all 99, who by the way, were behaving themselves so you could find this one sheep.

This makes no sense, but don't worry, it gets worse.

When the guy finds a stupid animal that had wandered off, putting all the others in jeopardy in doing so, what does he do?

He puts it on his shoulders and marches home with joy to call his friends together so that they can all celebrate his stupidity.

Like I said, this makes zero sense.

But Jesus says, "I tell you in just the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over 99 righteous people who have no need of repentance."

Well, first of all, I'd like to meet those 99. I have yet to meet them, okay?

But the joy in Heaven of just one sinner that repents, this is our hope because no matter how lost you are, my friend, no matter how far you have wandered off in sin, all of Heaven is glad to see you when you are found.

So, this Gospel, it's like a coin with two sides, I guess all coins have two sides.

It's a coin with two sides.

One side is hope, and that's our hope.

Now, if we flip the coin over, we have another side, and it's a warning.

Like a blinking red light, this is a warning.

And it will be brought together in fruition with the older brother, which, make no mistake, that's what this Gospel is really all about.

That smug self-righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, because they are the older brother.

You see, here's the deal. Jesus came for the lost.

And the thing about being lost is, to truly be lost, you kind of have to realize that you're lost.

In the same way, the only way we can be redeemed from sin is to first understand that **we are sinners** in need of redemption.

Which is why smug self-righteousness, as displayed by these Pharisees and Scribes, is so dangerous, because God can't work with that.

Hear me when I say, it is impossible for the smug self-righteous person to come to Christ because that requires repentance.

And before you can repent, you must first come to understand that you in fact are in need of repentance because you can't be found until you first understand that you're lost.

Does that make any sense?

Unfortunately, this is a concept that seems to be lost on many people.

And as a result, many of us are stumbling blindly through this life thinking we can see just fine.

But the truth of the matter is, we are sinners in need of repentance.

There is no such thing as good enough.

There is only recognizing that we are sinners, and through the cross, we have the privilege of repentance.

So, let's move on to that second parable.

We didn't read it today, but we're building up to our Gospel today.

This is a parable that, pardon the pun, gets lost in the shuffle.

What woman having 10 coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls in her friends and her neighbors and says, rejoice with me for I've found my lost coin. I tell you,

there'll be the same rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

So here we have this woman, and she's lost a coin. Now this coin, it's a very small amount, yet after a whole lot of searching, she finds it, and she calls the neighbors and says, come celebrate 'cause I found my lost change.

So, it's a bit odd.

And I've heard it suggested that the Lost Coin is really the kingdom of God, and that we must sweep our house feverously to find it, but I don't know about that.

I think, like the Lost Sheep, we are the Lost Coin, and you know the thing about a lost coin, it can't find itself.

Which really puts its finger on a misconception, one of the bigger misconceptions of religion today, and that is this idea that somehow, through virtue, and prayer, and practice, we can elevate ourselves to a status that God will deem us good enough.

But like I said, there is no such thing.

This is the religion of the Pharisees, but sadly it continues to this day.

But both these parables make it very clear that both the lost sheep and the lost coin can't find themselves.

So, Jesus welcomed sinners. Amen.

That's our hope.

But here's our warning, it is only when we come to realize that we are in fact lost, that we can put ourselves in a position to be found.

A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me a share of my inheritance that should come to me." So, the father divided the property up **between them**.

You know, it's hard to overstate how profoundly rude and culturally out of the box this request would've been, given the fact that inheritance, generally doesn't come until after the patriarch of the family dies.

This boy might as well have been saying, "father, I wish you were dead."

So, while the first two parables have been pretty bizarre, this one is already off the charts.

And I gotta tell you, I can't figure out what's more shocking.

The fact that this son would make this request or the fact that the father actually said "okay."

I'm sure there were some Pharisees in that audience that had sons of their own.

And I imagine they were probably thinking, "boy, I tell you, if my kid ever said anything like that, I would slap him into next Tuesday!"

But you can just see how Jesus is drawing them in. So, the boy goes off, squanders everything on a life of dissipation, which I'm not exactly sure what that word means, but it doesn't sound good.

He loses everything.

He sets out for a distant country, a far away land.

My friend, that's one thing about sin.

The more you live in sin, the more it puts you in a faraway land, far away from God.

That's the nature of sin.

The more you practice habitual sin in your life, the more you will separate yourself from the love of your Father.

So, when people come to me and say, "well, God seems so far away," I say, "well, **who do you thing moved?** The unmoved mover or you?"

But getting back to our wayward boy, finds himself in knee-deep pig dung starving to death, quite a metaphor, which of course, this is where sin will take you.

Coming to his senses, he thought, how many of my father hired hands have more than enough to eat?

But here I am dying of hunger. I shall get up. I shall return to my father, and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against you and against Heaven. I no

longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”
And you know, through the years, I'm sure a lot of people have looked at this moment.
Well, this is it.

This is the moment.
He coming to his senses.
This is when our boy repents.
I don't know about that.
I mean, look at what he's saying.
"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you, and I no longer deserve to be called your son, so treat me as you would one of the help."
I mean, does that really sound like repentance to you?
Because I don't know, to me, it sounds like plan B, just another scheme.
To me, it sounds like a man who has run outta cards and he's now gonna play that one more card, that sympathy card.
One more angle on the old man so he can eat.
So, he gets that idea in his head and he begins that long walk home.
And I imagine the whole way he's practicing what he's gonna say.
"Father, father I've sinned against you and against Heaven. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me like you would treat one of the workers."
Now watch this, okay?
While he was still a long way off, his father catches sight of him. Filled with compassion, he runs. Runs to his son, embraces him, and kisses him.
Watch this.
Did he stand on the porch with his arms folded saying, "well, here comes my boy?"
No.
Did he meet him halfway?
No.
What did he do?
He ran.
He ran to his son.
The Running Father.
You have to understand, my friends.
People, a man like this, of means in the ancient world, they didn't run anywhere, okay?
Running is what children do.
A man of dignity, a man of this stature, no, he ain't gonna run.
I mean, that would require that he granny up his tunic and he'd look silly, but he didn't care.
No, he ran.
Why?
Such is the reckless love of the Father for you.
And it is only in this moment, must have been shocking for the boy, I'm sure he didn't expect it.
But as he collapsed into the arms of his father, that unconditional love, this is where we see repentance.

And he is so in touch with his sin right now. Nobody needs to tell him.
And what comes?
Grace.
What comes?
Repentance and peace.
Why?
Because it is only once we claim the darkness, my friends, that God can bring the light.
And here it is, true repentance.
Now, let's talk about that older brother. Like I said, he's really what this is all about.
I know all the attention seems to go to the Prodigal Son, but the older brother is who he's talking to, because **the older brother represents the Pharisees and the Scribes who have a smug self-righteousness.**
And very much like this older brother, are refusing the invitation.
For two reasons the older brother refuses.
Number one, he's bought into this fallacy, this false narrative that somehow, he's good enough, right?
'Cause he's earned his place at the banquet. That's number one.
Number two, he's got such a hot resentment for his brother that it keeps him out of the banquet.
I've said it once, said it a thousand times.
There is nothing that will keep you from the love of your Father quite like a hot resentment.
This older brother is chained to the floor with his resentment.
And as ridiculous and sad as that might seem, I see it every day.
What can we learn from the Prodigal Son? How can we apply this into our life?
Well, I guess we can start by learning the fact that we need to understand that we, in fact, are sinners in need of a Savior.
And just as a broken computer cannot fix itself or a lost sheep or a lost coin can't find itself, we cannot redeem ourselves.
But our heavenly Father waits on the front porch, and He is keeping an eye out for you.
He's not waiting on you to come up to the porch.
No, no, no.
He's not waiting for you to meet Him halfway. No, no, no.
He's just waiting on you to make your move. Won't you make your move today?
Let us rise and return to our Father.
Yes, my friends.
Today, a sinner came home.
And you know, I'm reminded of another sinner, tradition names him **Dismas**.

Most of us know him as the **good thief**, remember him? Jesus was hung on a cross between two thieves.

One was heckling him.

"Oh Jesus, save yourself and save us."

Meanwhile, the other, Dismas, the good thief, said, "We deserve our punishment."

What is that?

Confession.

Then he turns to Jesus and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

What is that?

Repentance.

What did Jesus say?

"This day." This day, you will be with me in Heaven."

Now, I don't know exactly what that'll look like. I imagine a great hall, probably a lot of marble.

Maybe kinda like the lobby of the Greenbrier Hotel, you know? Me, I prefer simple.

I don't know.

With a heavenly band of angels all crowding around awaiting the return of the Son.

And when Jesus steps into that hall, there'll be a hush on the crowd.

And who's with Him? A dirty stinking thief. A sinner.

And Jesus will cry out, "Father, I bring you a sinner.

And I'm gonna be bringing a whole lot more just like him."

We are 'sinners saved by grace'.

Rev. Katie Dailey
First United Church of Christ
68651 S. Forest
Richmond, MI 48062
586-727-3155
my cell: 586-202-8644

Easter is around the corner. Once again Holy Week will begin with Palm Sunday and the reading of the passion, then we have Maundy Thursday at 7 pm, and Good Friday at NOON at the Beebe Park Pavilion. Good Friday is a brief and just enough to remember the importance of the day with song and prayer.