

## Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 6, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Luke 15:1-10** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. **2** But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

**3** Then Jesus told them this parable: **4** “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? **5** And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders **6** and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ **7** I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

**8** “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins[a] and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? **9** And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ **10** In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### “Share the Joy of Jesus”

When she turned the key in the lock and opened the front door, she could tell something wasn’t right. No pitter-patter of paws, no bundle of fur bounding across the carpet. Eery silence. He’s probably just getting into mischief. But there were no spills across the kitchen floor or trail of snacks leading to a secret stash. And he wasn’t in his usual spot where he would be occupied with a new toy. As she mentally eliminated each likely possibility, she started to get more concerned with all the more dangerous scenarios.

Well, she wasn’t going to just pace and worry. She strapped on her comfy shoes and started walking through the neighborhood, calling out out ‘Tobie’ then ‘come here Tobie’ and even ‘mommy has a treat for you.’ Up one side of the street, down the other. Around the block and down the side streets. No answer to her calls. No jangling dog tags against collar to the sound of her voice. So she had to take her search efforts to the next level. She taped posters to signs and tacked them to poles throughout the neighborhood then started knocking on doors.

It didn’t matter where she would find Tobie or what he had done to get loose or why he had run away or what he was doing now. The only thing that mattered was finding him. Whatever it took, however long she had to search, any amount of energy expended would be worth it just to have him back. To hold him and pet him and call his name and know he was safe back inside her home. That happiness was all that mattered.

That’s the heart of Jesus. That’s how Jesus feels about people. All of us. Every human being on the planet. Dominating everything else he does is the joy at finding one single lost soul.

Rejoicing over their repentance as he welcomes them into his heavenly family. That's the joy you and I get to share.

Luke chapter 15 opens with the scene of tax collectors and sinners gathering around Jesus. Jesus has gained a reputation. Jesus was well-known as someone who unmistakably condemned sins, yet at the same time opened the divine doorway to heaven for all. So people were drawn to him. They acknowledged their guilt before Jesus and found his forgiveness refreshing.

This past week the sentencing of a white police officer who shot and killed her neighbor after going into the wrong apartment went viral. The brother of the victim spoke up to tell the convicted officer he forgave her and then wept as he gave her a huge hug. Less buzz-inducing but just as buzz-worthy was the statement by the victim's mother expressing her hurt over losing her son and calling for justice as a consequence of the wrongs that occurred.

People don't often see this picture of Christianity. This consistency. Not excusing sin and yet generously extending forgiveness. I think this case in Dallas stands out because it is so rare that our world gets to see the real heart of Jesus displayed so clearly. I take this challenge personally. And I hope you do too. How can Christians and Christian churches earn the same reputation Jesus had? How can we stand firm on the truth of Scripture and not compromise while we hold out Jesus for a world of sinners? How can you and I share the heart of Jesus? How can we share the joyful heart of Jesus for repentant sinners?

There is already something different about the way Jesus views people than my default way of thinking. Naturally, we tend to lump people into categories of lostness. Degrees of potentially being found. There are people who are really lost. They have so many issues, so much baggage, that we will really have to stick with them and pick our opportunities just to deliver the truth of God's Word. Instead of joy, I can't help but feel anxiety. Instead of the heart of Jesus, I am constantly conscious of the inadequacies of my own life. How could I possibly reach them?

Then there are the people who don't even realize they are lost. They aren't a mess. Their life isn't in shambles. Someone told me about how Pastor Jim used to talk about flat-tire Christians. When something went wrong in life, they reached out for Jesus. But what about the people who hardly ever seem to have flat tires? And when they do, they seem to handle those flat tires on their own? See, these are the people who might look down on me and feel a sense of superiority over my life. So I admit to having a dose of frustration and even anger at these people. No joy at the prospect of sharing Jesus with them. Instead of the heart of Jesus, I have the eye roll and deep sigh when I realize they don't see themselves in the same category as me.

Naturally, I have to admit that I generally see the lost people most capable of being found as people who are like me. But that weird kid sitting by himself in the cafeteria, the angry woman at work no one wants to talk to, the family member who has excluded himself because of his selfishness and callous dealings with his own flesh and blood, I just can't

bring myself to see them as potentially found. People who aren't believers and don't even realize they are lost cause me anxiety. We don't say it, but our silence and inactivity mean we treat them like they are a lost cause.

The more you read the Gospels, the more you realize how wrong we often are about Jesus. At least in the sense of public perception, what people commonly believe about Jesus apart from cracking open an actual Bible. That Jesus is this well-respected teacher and admired philosopher. That he dazzled people with his charisma and attracted crowds to his magnetic personality. Well, that's only partly true, isn't it? I mean, Jesus wasn't unanimously embraced and adored. The Gospels make it clear not everyone was a member of the Jesus fan club. Jesus wasn't being welcomed to give guest lectures at the university, deliver TED talks to the intellectuals, or publish columns in the New York Times. His writings weren't passed around the open floor plan offices at Google or Facebook or Apple.

No, the more you read the Gospels, the more you see Jesus in conflict with the religious elite and spiritual influencers of his day. Confrontations with Pharisees and religious scholars were the norm. They seem to always have some kind of beef with what Jesus is doing or teaching. So it's curious that while the sinners and tax collectors are drawn to Jesus, He isn't repelled away from the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. There they sit, letting out long drawn out sighs as tax collectors leave behind lives of greed as Jesus brings them to repentance. There they stand, arms crossed, muttering under their breath as drunkards and habitual adulterers find forgiveness in the one who had to be more than a great teacher or miracle worker or revolutionary philosopher. The indignity grows in them until mouths twitch with barely contained rage over the lost children of God brought into the fold by the Great Shepherd.

But it is for them that Jesus tells this parable. Jesus tells this parable for the benefit of Pharisees. Not to defend himself. Not to poke them in the eye and aggravate them more than necessary. But to showcase the joy of God's forgiveness as something appealing to everyone. Pharisees included. The unrepentant especially.

Jesus confronts Pharisees and scribes so they see they are not righteous as they might suppose. Jesus wants them to know they are lost. And since they are lost, Jesus wants them to know with unmistakable clarity that he is looking for them. Not waiting for them to make the first move and somehow start looking for them. He is seeking, searching, neglecting everything else for the sake of their souls. His heart goes out to them. His heart hurts over the damage they have already done to themselves, the danger they are putting their souls through, the risks they are still facing. And so Jesus goes after them. It doesn't matter how they got there, what they were thinking, how they thought they would make their lives better apart from the loving arms of their Savior. All that matters is that he has them back. All that matters is they are back in his arms.

He is the father frantically searching for his toddler at a crowded beach when lifeguards warned of dangerous rip currents. He is the mother who darts out of the roadside convenience store when she realizes her little girl is no longer at her side, but could be wandering along dangerously close to the busy, unfamiliar highway. Jesus is hunting with

urgency to secure them, even them. He wants to express joy. He wants to hear confession and repentance and announce forgiveness without any strings attached. He wants to embrace them as the mother who pulls that little girl back away from a speeding semi. He wants tears of joy streaming down his face as he hugs the toddler safely secured on the beach blanket.

And here is really the key to being a Christian and then a Christian church with the same reputation as Jesus. I am the one who is lost. Jesus is the one who sought me out. Jesus never saw me as too far gone or too hard to reach. Jesus makes no mistake about the sins he sees over and over again in my life. Jesus sees my daily need for repentance and invites me to unburden myself of this guilt. To put it all on him and rejoice in his forgiveness. And share in his joy. Rejoice that I am the one lost and found. Rejoice that I will be joining his celebration in heaven.

Because who doesn't need to repent? Who is really righteous? The only way any person can become righteous is when God declares them innocent of all sin through the sacrifice of Jesus. Forgiveness only comes through the recognition of individual and universal sinfulness, that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."** (Romans 3:23,24)

Researchers at Harvard are working on ways they can treat aging the way they would treat any disease. Mice in laboratories have shown promise that some year in the future humans may be able to be treated with an anti-aging molecule to stay younger longer and add decades to our lives. But they will ultimately never come up with a cure that allows us to live forever. And so it will always be foolish to treat anything in this life as if it lasts forever. Except one thing. There is one thing we can take with us into God's eternal kingdom. People. You can bring people. If you bring your children to Christ and they remain in faith, they will be with you in heaven. If your friend comes to know Christ, he or she will come with you to the party. Even the people you were tempted to give up on and write off as too lost or too righteous to care about Jesus, if they saw in you the heart of Jesus, if they were able to see the joy of Jesus finding you in your life, if that translates into God's determination to find them, they will share unending joy with you in heaven. That's the joy that can fill your heart as you reach the lost today. Amen.