

Sermon #1,272: St. Luke 15:1-10
7-2-17 (Trinity 3), Bethany-Princeton MN

“REJOICE WITH ME”

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, we all like sheep have gone astray, having allowed ourselves to be led away from the right path by Satan and our own sinful flesh. We beseech You graciously to forgive us all our sins for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ; and enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may abide in Your Word, and in true repentance and a steadfast faith continue in Your Church unto the end, and obtain eternal salvation, through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Veit Dietrich Collect for the Trinity 3 Gospel*)

Sermon Text, Luke 15:1-10 (v. 6-7). ⁶ And ... he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your Words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. By Your word of truth, Lord, find us when we are lost. Amen.

Fellow redeemed in Christ, of whose flock we are only a hundredth part:

Some of the most treasured, comforting words from Jesus’ mouth weren’t spoken to those who loved Him but quite the opposite.

For example, to whom would you think Jesus said the words, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*”? To poor distressed souls seeking relief? No, but to people who were restless, impatient and totally uninterested in repenting of their sins, to whom He said, “*It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you*” (see Mt 11:20ff); Matthew says it was “*at that time*” Jesus said His “*Come to Me ... and I will give you rest.*”

What about “*I Am the Good Shepherd*”? Did Jesus say this to people who followed Him like trusting lambs? No, it was to Jews who did not believe in Him, who were being like wolves, who said He had a demon and tried to stone Him (*Jn 10:11, 19-20, 31*); to them Jesus said, “*I Am the Good Shepherd.*”

Here in this gospel lesson it's the same. Luke's gospel is similar to the preaching of the apostle Paul; it presents the truth that salvation is by grace, it's for everyone and God loves every sinner. This 15th chapter, with the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, is the ultimate illustration of this message. So whom might you expect Jesus' audience for these parables to be? Perhaps some Gentiles? Or the downtrodden or outcast, those who are troubled by their sins?

Well, they are in the room - "**the tax collectors and the sinners.**" But Jesus isn't speaking these parables to them. He's speaking the parables to "**the Pharisees and scribes [who] complained,**" murmured and grumbled, "**saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'**" So Jesus isn't speaking this to a receptive audience, but a hostile one. It's to them Jesus speaks the parables, and it's also to them He directs the words "**Rejoice with me [Me]!**"

These are words He puts into the mouth of the shepherd after he finds the lost sheep that strayed, and the woman after she finds the coin she had mislaid. But we know whose words these are. We know who's really speaking: Jesus. He is speaking for the entire Godhead. These are the words of the Triune God.

We should stop and listen to God saying, "**Rejoice with Me!**" It tells us so much about God, and it's so beautiful. This is of course a picture of heaven. We understand that from Jesus' concluding words to each of these two parables. First He speaks about the great "**joy in heaven over one sinner who repents,**" and then He tells us that this is "**joy in the presence of the angels of God,**" the angels in heaven.

When we think of the rejoicing that takes place in heaven, we think first of the angels and then of the saints in heaven. We know from Revelation about all the saints and angels praising God and the Lamb on the throne, so I think usually we imagine God just sitting there, listening to and accepting their praises of Him, Himself the source of the joy and not actually doing the rejoicing. But Jesus does not say, "*Rejoice and I will listen.*" Jesus says, "**Rejoice with Me!**"

We need to hear this. We need to hear that God Himself is rejoicing, that He is giving voice to the joy that is in Him, because guess what this re-

joicing is about? You! He is rejoicing over you! To tell the truth, if we knew and noticed this like we should, it would embarrass us a little. If all His gaze is directed at you, and He invites everyone else to do the same, you'd probably want everyone to look away. Because we don't stand up under scrutiny, and we know it.

It isn't that we don't want to be noticed. But usually it's for the wrong things or it's got the wrong motivation. You want to be noticed for the good works you do. You want to get credit, and can't stand it when somebody else is noticed and praised ahead of you. You want people to know how much you've sacrificed or suffered.

But what you don't want people to know are the things you could rightly be blamed for. You hide those things. You hide your hateful and hurtful thoughts about others, you hide your envy, jealousy and discontentment, you hide your laziness and wastefulness and instead advertise how hard you work, you hide what you give to the Lord vs. what you spend on yourself, you hide your selfish, self-serving ways most of all.

Obviously the Lord does not rejoice in that. He does not rejoice in how we stray from Him like foolish sheep, He does not rejoice in our getting ourselves lost under all that this sinful world promotes but really is nothing but grime and dirt that covers up the perfect righteousness and true beauty that we have in Him. That's what we are always losing, and He does not rejoice in our being lost.

However, He turns this into rejoicing. When He says, "**Rejoice with Me,**" God is not looking at what we have done, but at what He has done with us. Jesus tells this part of our story, and pictures it, in the few little words which are virtually the same in each parable: "**when he has found it,**" in the first parable, and "**when she has found it,**" in the second. Jesus does not go into the details of how loudly or how many times the shepherd had to call out, what difficulties in the search there were, with wild animals or perilous foot-paths, or how late the hour when he finally found the sheep. He only describes it as "**going after the one which is lost until he finds it.**" It's the same in the other parable, where Jesus does not tell all the grimy details of the woman's search for the coin, only that it's a matter of "**searching carefully until she finds it.**"

This is how He pictures what He does for you. Being lost is what you do; being found is what He does. God “finds” me by finding me “*just as I am, without one plea,*” He finds you (like the lost sheep) worn out, bruised and hurt by your own sins, and (like the lost coin) covered with the grime of your sinful uncleanness, in other words He finds you just as the Law shows you to be, as in a mirror, not the way you hide what you are from everyone else, but what you really are like in your thoughts, words, and deeds. He finds you – changes you from “lost” to “found” -- by declaring you forgiven of all sin, He pronounces you “clean,” He declares that for the sake of Jesus’ perfect life, atoning death and resurrection you are pure and holy in His sight and it is as if you never strayed from His side.

And then He says, “**Rejoice with Me!**” You – the forgiven you – are His rejoicing. You – what He has made of you by His grace – are His rejoicing. He is rejoicing in His own redeeming, saving work.

But to whom is He saying this? In Jesus’ parable, the shepherd and the woman say it to their “**friends and neighbors,**” and we know Jesus is saying it to the Pharisees and scribes, who were not His friends. But Jesus was saying it in front of the tax collectors and sinners. They were certainly listening in, as today we are listening in. As Jesus tells this parable He is putting “**the tax collectors and the sinners**” on His shoulders, letting them look around, and drink it in, as He looks the haters of grace in the eye and says, “**Rejoice with Me! There is joy in heaven ... in the presence of the angels of God ... over these sinners who repent!**”

He does this for you in the Gospel. He says it in your baptism. He says it to you in the absolution. He says it to you as you eat with Him in the Lord’s Supper. He is picking you up and putting you on His shoulder, with no sins that you can ever be accused of.

And then He lets you look around. What do you see? That you are not alone. You are surrounded by angels and archangels, by your loved ones who have preceded you to heaven, by the sinners who have been forgiven of just as many things as you, by those who have been haters of grace in their own ways. To all of them – and you – He is saying, “**Rejoice with Me!**” It is much easier to do this rejoicing when you see that you are not alone. We receive the Gospel together, in Word and Sacrament,

and we thus encourage one another to rejoice, but the greatest encouragement is that He, the Lord, rejoices with us. He promises that as we rejoice with Him now, we'll rejoice with Him forever in heaven, where we will no longer need to be encouraged to rejoice. Amen!