

Repenting for sin is not a happy thing to do. We search our hearts and we are filled with regret for what we've done, and we say we're sorry to each other and to God. But the Scriptures read, "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." That's what we're going to talk about this morning and what it has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

PRAYER

READ Luke 15:1-10: Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." 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? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And 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. Or what woman, having ten silver coins,⁸ if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Jesus' teachings and sermons were often addressed to one group or another, to his disciples, to the religious authorities, or to working people, to an individual who had a specific need or to a belligerent person. But in the Gospel reading we find Jesus amidst a mixed crowd. We read, **Luke 15:1-2, 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."**

On the one hand there were the tax collectors and sinners—tax collectors were worse than the IRS, collecting not only for Caesar but for themselves too. The sinners were prostitutes and other social outsiders who did not or were not allowed to perform the regular sacrificial and purification rituals in the temple in

Jerusalem. And then there were the Pharisees and scribes, the religious mucky mucks.

The author of the Gospel, St. Luke, wanted us to see irony in how he described the setting here, that “tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to” Jesus, while the religious types were grumbling at him. It’s ironic for how bad can a person really be if they want to be close to Jesus!

The Pharisees and scribes even complained about it, that he ate with the people.

Jesus knew their hearts, everyone’s hearts, tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees and scribes, and so he told them two parables. Jesus said,

Luke 15:4-10

"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.

⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she LOSES one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she FINDS it?

⁹ And when she has FOUND it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have FOUND the coin that I had LOST.'

¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let’s analyze the parables. One is about a shepherd who went out to find a lost sheep, and the other one is about a woman who searched for a lost coin. Consider these similarities between the parables:

- Both parables involve a character who is looking for and finding something, the shepherd and the woman. These characters represent God.
- Losing and finding are the key ideas in both parables.

- The parables each consist of 3-parts: the losing and looking; the finding and the rejoicing; and Christ's explanation.
- Concerning the losing and looking, the shepherd and the woman both take responsibility for finding what has been lost.
- When the shepherd and the woman find their sheep and coin, they both call together their friends and neighbors to rejoice with them.
- Christ's explanation in both parables is that there is joy in heaven "over one sinner who repents."
- And this brings us to our last point: Being lost in both parables means one's relationship with God has been broken. Thus Christ's explanation about repentance.

In the first parable about the Shepherd and the Lost Sheep, Jesus said, **"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."**

Jesus was being sarcastic. For there is no such thing as a righteous person who does not need to repent, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This is where Jesus was speaking specifically to the Pharisees and scribes.

All of the sheep, even the 99, were lost, that is, their relationship with God was broken and they needed to repent. St Peter wrote later on, **1 Peter 2:24-25, "Jesus Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."**

We return to the "Shepherd and Overseer" of our souls, but, alas, sheep have a nasty habit of getting lost over and over again. We're distracted from praying and Bible study, we lose our fire for outreach and doing good works, the things of this world steal away our joy and we begin to question whether or not God really loves us.

As we continue our journey to the Cross and our celebration of Christ's victory on Easter Sunday, I think of Psalm 119: 173-76:

Psalm 119:173-76

(O Lord,) Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts. ¹⁷⁴ I long for Your salvation, ..., and Your law is my delight. ¹⁷⁵ Let my soul live and praise you, and let Your rules help me. ¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.

The psalmist is a devout follower of God. He desires nothing but to meditate on God's Word, live in God's Kingdom, and to enjoy the Lord's salvation. But he is a lost sheep. He is humble and he is transparent about his vulnerability. I think this is how we should think of ourselves.

For we are sheep who get lost, and then found, and then lost again. We can't help ourselves. So like the psalmist I call on the Lord, **"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments."**

Yes, find me Lord, bring me back into the fold! Protect me from myself, from false shepherds, and from the wolves in this world who would steal away my joy, in Jesus' name. Amen.

From this psalm I have a new motto: SHEEP ON A MISSION. Remember how in both parables the main character calls together their friends and neighbors to rejoice with them over what has been found.

To be a sheep on a mission is a humble calling but it's also a noble calling, for the sheep, once lost but now found, have been given a gift to share their joy with other sheep who have been found!

Let us reflect on how God Himself, in His providence, takes personal responsibility for the care of our souls, like the shepherd of a lost sheep, like the woman of a lost coin.

The Lord finds us when we submit to His Word and see our sins and we repent for them. Whatever is on our conscience and draws us away from the peace of God this is the thing for which we need to repent.

From the depths of our misery we have experienced the Lord reaching out into the farthest pastures and bringing us home into His fold. And He's looked into our hearts and said, "I found you." And we remember His joy and peace, and how He provides for our every need, and it is good.

That is our testimony: Our deliverance from our greatest weakness is our story, how we were found, how we came to repentance, how we met Jesus in the light and left the darkness behind. This is how sheep fulfill their mission: Keep being found, keep being found by the Good Shepherd, the caretaker and guardian of our souls, reliving the story and talking about it with other lost sheep whom the Lord means to find through you.

Friends in Christ, this week may you be lifted up with confidence in your walk with God. Once you were lost, but now you're found.

May you keep being found, clinging closer and closer to the "Shepherd and Overseer" of your soul, never losing confidence that the Lord will never leave nor forsake you.

May you be one of those who helps the Lord find his lost sheep, sharing the good news with which the Lord saved your heart and soul with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.