

Luke 15:1-10

Luke Chapter 15:1, **“Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming close to him to hear him”**. The tax collectors and sinners come to listen to Jesus. They know and acknowledge that they were sinners and are drawn to Jesus because they sense that he can make things right, he can change their lives, they saw an opportunity in Jesus to be saved. But in verse 2, a contrast is introduced, the Pharisees and Scribes. They grumbled instead of listening. Their grumbling stems from the fact that Jesus offers table fellowship to known sinners, conferring dignity and acceptance on the undignified and unacceptable.

But this was not the first time for the Pharisees to grumble simply because the undignified are now being dignified. In Luke 5:30, the Pharisees and Scribes complained when Jesus called Levi and gave a banquet for him in his house. On that occasion, Jesus responded, **“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”**. In 7:36ff the Pharisees and the Scribes complained when Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman.

But we cannot judge the Pharisees because they reacted like normal human beings.

They were in line with our general teaching, because we teach our children that **“Bad company leads to bad conduct”**; and we are in line with the teaching of Amos, 3:3, **“Can two walks together, unless they be agreed?”**; also in agreement with the teaching of Paul, in 2 Corinthians 6:14, **“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers, for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”**

So, we must concede, however, that the Pharisees and Scribes had a point, but they were out of context.

There is a tension here that we must honor, this was not only a story about the good Jesus versus bad Pharisees. It was, instead, a story about religious men, pillars of their community, whose preoccupation with ritual observance has blinded them to their own sin. It is a story about the people whose concern for God’s law has caused them to forget God’s love for sinners. Jesus calls them and us to love sinners while hating sin. He challenges them and us to hope for repentance. He calls them and us to celebrate the redemption of even one sinner.

Friends, literal reading of verse 4a is interesting, **“Which of you men?”**. The question, **“Which of you men?”** makes it sound as if leaving the ninety-nine is the natural response, but that is far from clear. In business ethics, we would protect the core business, i.e., the 99%. We can survive a 1% percent loss but not a 99% percent loss. An old Gospel song speaks of leaving the 99 “safely in the fold,” but in this case Jesus speaks of leaving the sheep, not in a safe sheepfold, but in the wilderness, dangerous place. The Matthean version (Matt. 18:12ff) talks about the shepherd leaving the sheep on “the mountains”, a more dangerous place. There is risk on the part of the remaining sheep, nevertheless, because the shepherd knows the sheep’s name and has got love for it cannot simply “write it off” without trying to help.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus has introduced us to the kingdom of God, a place of upside-down rules. This is a kingdom story, which reflects the radical nature of God’s love. Ordinary rules of business calculation do not apply. The loss of one sheep breaks the shepherd’s heart, so the shepherd searches until he finds the sheep. But in the parable of the lost sheep, we are talking about only a 1% loss. In the parable of the lost coin, we are now talking about a 10% loss.

Luke 15:8ff, a woman had 10 drachma coins, this was equivalent to a Roman Denarius, a day wage, about C\$150, not a fortune, but enough to get the woman’s attention. Most of us, if we lost this much money, would be fussed until we found it. The coin may have been one of the ten coins of her dowry. If we can’t identify with a woman who has lost ten coins, we might consider how we feel when we can’t find our car keys, or our cell phone, or our television remote control.

In both parables, the emphasis is on the joy of finding the lost and this has been metaphorically likened to God’s joy over one sinner who repents. God’s joy is the real point of these parables. God is joyful when a sinner repents and invites the rest of us to join the celebration.

We need to recapture this love for the lost and celebration at the lost being found.

The scribes and Pharisees have murmured against Jesus, saying, **“this man welcomes sinners, and eats with them”**. They have obviously put themselves in a “no repentance needed” category and believe that Jesus has compromised himself by associating with those who do need repentance. however, Jesus made it clear to them that, everyone needs to repent, and those who do not will perish.

God's joy contrasts bluntly with the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes. The grumblers do not welcome sinners into their presence lest they be contaminated by association. They criticize Jesus for welcoming sinners, even though his purpose is redemption. They seem to understand the value of one sheep or one coin but would "write off" one sinner. Even if they had to give a repentant sinner a chance, their cooperation would be guarded. They would always remember past sins; the repentant sinner would always be suspect.

After all, even if Jesus was eating with the sinners, how would that negatively affect the Pharisees and Scribes? They were neither friends of Jesus nor friends of the tax collectors. I long for a tolerant Church, a Church which gives every believer an opportunity to access God's grace. But the tax collectors and sinners did motivate me because they were not moved by the reaction of the Pharisees and Scribes, they knew that we did not come to listen Pharisees and Scribes but Jesus hence whatever the Pharisees and Scribes think about us does not matter as long as Jesus recognize us. I long for believers who mind heavenly business and not Church politicking. Its good to be recognized by people but rather better to be recognized by God.

May God bless you aal. Amen