

Luke 15:1–10
Trinity III
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
June 16, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled against Jesus, saying: “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” They meant it as an insult, but their statement turned out to be prophetic. “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” It’s like when the High Priest Caiaphas said: “it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” He meant it would be better to just get rid of Jesus than to have the Romans squash a rebellion. But in speaking against our LORD, Caiaphas ended up prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (John 11:50–52). Or when the Jews said of Jesus: “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Matthew 27:25). What they meant as a curse was actually a prophecy: the blood of Jesus Christ is a blessing. The blood of God cleanses us and our children from all sin. Here again we have an example of a statement made in ignorance that turns out to be prophetic of who Jesus is: “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” The Pharisees and scribes meant this as an insult. But God takes their curse and turns it into a blessing. Yes, Jesus receives *us* sinners and eats with us. What a profound truth! Jesus then explains this truth with three parables that get to the same point: This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them.

First Jesus talks about a flock of a hundred sheep. One sheep wanders away, as sheep are prone to do. The shepherd goes out to find the sheep, to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the Good Shepherd and you are the sheep who love to wander. In Adam, all are

lost. In Adam, all mankind fell into sin, into the muck and mire. In Adam, all die. You were conceived and born in sin. From the beginning you were a slave to sin. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has come to the garden to find you. He calls out to you in His Word: “Where are you?” The sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and they follow Him (John 10:27–28). The sheep realize they’ve gone astray when they are confronted by God’s Holy Law. But the Good Shepherd came to lay down His life for you and to bring you back to the flock.

Jesus heals the sick, not those who think they are perfectly fine. Jesus came not to call those who think they are righteous in themselves. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31–32). The Shepherd became a sheep that He might lay down His life for the sheep. He is the Lamb of God. At the cross, the sin of the world was placed upon His shoulders (Lev 16:21) that He might place you upon His shoulders and carry you back to the fold. In Baptism, you are clothed with Christ as with the skins of a lamb. He is sacrificed that your sin and your shame might be covered.

And when the Shepherd has found the lost sheep, He lays it on His shoulders rejoicing. Jesus rejoices to save you. And when He brings you home, He calls together His friends and His neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’” The LORD rejoices with all the host of heaven when a sinner repents and returns to the way of God. He throws a party in your honor, a feast to celebrate the return of one little lost sheep. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them.

Next, Jesus compares His work with that of a woman who had ten silver coins but then lost one. This woman lights a lamp and sweeps the house, seeking diligently until she finds the lost coin. This form of the parable shows especially the work of the Church, the Bride of Christ, in calling sinners to repentance and to the free forgiveness of sins found in Jesus Christ alone. In

the Bible, the Church is pictured in feminine terms. She is the Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem above, our mother (Gal 4:26). That's how the Apostle Paul describes the Church. In the 3rd century A.D., Bishop Cyprian of Carthage in North Africa said it like this: "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother" (ANF 5:423)--- "from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated."

The Church is a loving mother who seeks after her lost children and longs for their return home. The woman searches diligently for the lost ones who bear the image of God, as a coin bears an image. She takes the lamp of God's Word in her hand and with the preaching of God's Word she sweeps the floor, getting into every nook and cranny to find where this coin might have rolled. Jesus is the image of God and He restores the image of God in us, which had been lost in the Fall. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49). The woman rejoices at finding the lost coin. She calls together her friends and neighbors, saying: "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." How else to rejoice but by feasting? So is there joy before the angels of God in Heaven over one sinner who repents. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them.

Finally, Jesus narrates the story of the Prodigal Son, the third piece of this lesson. Historically, the Gospel reading for today ends after the lost sheep and lost coin. But the parable of the lost son is the culmination, reiterating the message in yet a third way to really drive the point home. The word "prodigal" means "reckless" or "wasteful." A man had two sons. The younger son asked for his part of the inheritance and then went off to live a reckless life, satisfying his baser animal urges, eating, drinking, and rising up to play. After squandering his property in reckless living and having nothing left when a famine arose, the young man hired himself out to a pig farmer. He longed to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, but no one gave

him anything. That's when the young man came to his senses. After hitting rock bottom, he realized that even a slave in his father's house has more than enough bread to eat. So the young man proposes to return to his father, confess his sins, and seek a position as one of his father's servants.

The son confessed: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." The young man came to his senses, confessed his sin, and returned home in humility. God calls us to such humility. Sometimes it takes reaching rock bottom. Sometimes it takes the worst and most dire threats of God's Law, that the soul that sins shall die, and that soul is you. On the day you disobey God's commandment, you are sentenced to death. If that's what happened to Adam and Eve the first time they sinned, what of all of us, the descendants of Adam and Eve, who can't go a single day without sinning? God's Word is clear. Your transgressions of His holy Law are a capital offense, meriting eternal punishment. If we say we have no sin, if we think our sins aren't so bad, if we think we're off the hook because other people have done worse things, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8-9).

The son was still a long way off when his father saw him, felt compassion, ran and embraced him and kissed him. Before the son had even articulated his confession of sin, the father was right there to forgive, and where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation. The father welcomes his son back to the family and gives him a new life. We, like the younger son, were dead in our trespasses and sins, following the course of this world, following the Devil, living in the passions of the flesh and carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy,

because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:1–6). By grace you have been saved! God the Father welcomes you back into His home. As the father restores the younger son—giving him the best robe, the ring, and shoes—so does our heavenly Father restore you to His family.

In fact, not only does the Father restore you to sonship in Jesus Christ, He also celebrates. “Bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate. As the shepherd celebrated when he brought the lost sheep home and as the woman celebrated when she found the lost coin, so does the whole company of Heaven rejoice and celebrate when a lost sinner is found, when those who are dead in their sin are made alive in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost and He rejoices when a sinner comes home. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them.

But the older brother was upset when he heard the news. He became angry and refused to go into the party. As Cain murdered Abel, so does the older brother murder the younger brother in his heart. He is upset that the younger brother’s sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart is acceptable to the father. At the same time, this unrepentant older brother shows he doesn’t recognize his own sin. He brings his worthless sacrifice to the father: “Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.” The older brother was jealous of the father’s mercy. He thought it unjust for the younger son to be welcomed back into the family with a celebration. He accuses his father like the Pharisees accused Jesus: “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Yes he does. And the fact that the father also goes out to meet the older son means God doesn’t just receive obvious sinners back home. He also welcomes home

those whose sin is hidden and not known to the world. Don't begrudge the Father's generosity toward others and don't hide your sin from Him, whether that sin is open and manifest or whether it is hidden away in your heart. Jesus receives sinners. Come to Him.

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.” This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them. The Good Shepherd finds the lost sheep. The coin is returned to the treasury. The lost son is drawn home by the father's love and mercy. Come to His table and eat with Him. Here, at the Lord's Supper, in the Body and Blood of Jesus, the rejoicing of Heaven is united to earth. The celebration has already begun. We rejoice with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven that you, dear sinner, have come home. This man, Jesus, receives sinners and eats with them. Praise God! In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.