

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Youth Sunday

February 16, 2020

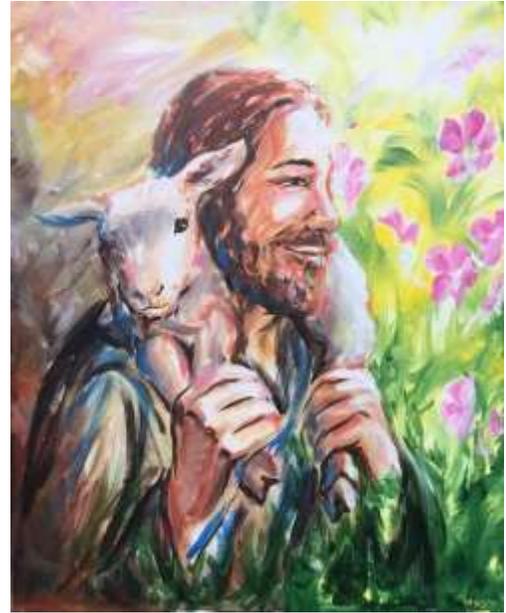
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Isaiah 43: 1-5

Luke 15: 1-10

You Will Be Found

Have you ever read a news article and questioned, can they possibly be human? They are treating people as if they are dirt, can they possibly be human?



Hear these words from the band, “Casting Crowns,”... “Jesus friend of sinners...help us to remember we are all the least of these, let the memory of your mercy, bring your people to their knees. Nobody knows what we’re fighting for, only what we’re against, when we judge the wounded. What if we put down our signs, crossed over the lines and loved like you did?”

Jesus, friend of sinners, what if we loved like you did? What if you opened our eyes to the world at the end of our pointing fingers, let our hearts be led by mercy, help us to reach with open hearts and open doors?

The life and ministry of Jesus is a really good lesson in contradiction that confuses a lot of people. For those confused when reading the Gospel, Jesus’ life simply is filled with messages that on the surface seem to conflict with one another. For example, how can one really love their enemies, or do right by those who treat them with evil intentions? Or love your neighbor as yourself even when they fly the Confederate flag?

Often times Jesus found himself contradicting the religious leaders of his day. They were saying one thing, but then along came Jesus and challenged them to go beyond their self-imposed limitations.

Unfortunately, the Church of today sadly has retreated to thinking that it is opposed to or inconvenient to associate with those who are not like us.

Yet our Lord was just the opposite; time after time He showed that his mission was to save the lost because, in the end, what did they accuse him of? ... hanging with the wrong crowd.

It is true that many of us are hanging with the wrong crowd, but the problem is that our purpose is not the same as Jesus’. We want to be popular, or we need to feel accepted; yes, even as adults.

Jesus hung out with sinners for one reason only – to save them. His goal was to impact their lives with his life-changing message. He was a friend to the lost.

The Pharisees of yesterday and the Pharisees of today share the same common thought process – the church is no place for sinners. But on the contrary, the church, in order to change lives, must be a hospital that seeks those who need spiritual healing.

Luke, chapter 15 is what I like to call “God’s Lost and Found Chapter.” We all remember that at the beginning of the school year the Lost and Found box is empty, but by the end of the year it is bursting at the seams. This chapter is not three separate parables, as many of us like to think, but rather one parable with three parts. Jesus used three illustrations in this chapter to answer the Scribes’ and Pharisees’ accusations that he associated with the wrong crowd. Jesus doesn’t deny this but rather confirms it by giving them three examples of His love for those who are unlovable and unworthy. What he actually did was use this opportunity to state his mission *to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance*. The three illustrations Jesus used to do that are a lost SHEEP, lost SILVER and a lost SON. This morning on Youth Sunday, we’ll hear from the first two parts of this parable.

But I have one serious question for God before we dive in deep with this text: if he can know each and every person created in his image and find them when they are lost and bring them back rejoicing, Lord why can’t you help me find my lost keys?

This text is fairly simple to understand as far as parables go. One sheep runs off, shepherd goes to find, brings sheep back, and all rejoice. One coin is lost, woman finds coin, and she rejoices. We’ve all lost something that meant a lot to us and rejoiced when it was found. But parables aren’t meant to be taken at face value or read on the surface.

Listen to this story: Once upon a time there were two families who lived next door to each other. The families were quite different. The first family called themselves Christians. They took good care of their house and lawn. They never used tobacco, alcohol, or drugs. They never cursed or fought loudly with one another. The kids were never in trouble with the law. And they all went to church every Sunday.

The second family had nothing to do with God. Their house and lawn were a mess. They smoked and drank to excess and used marijuana to “mellow out.” They cursed and fought loudly with one another. The kids were always getting in trouble with the law. They never went to church.

One day the teenage daughter from the first family told her father, “You know, Dad, I think there’s trouble next door. Their kids told some of my friends at school that their dad and mom are going to get a divorce.”

“Alright!” Dad shouted excitedly, as his favorite team on the game he was watching threw a touchdown pass. After the extra point was kicked he mumbled, “Divorce, huh? Too bad!”

The daughter went into the kitchen where her mother was preparing dinner and repeated the news. Her mother nodded her head knowingly. “That’s what they get for not going to church and

for living like they do. Let that be a lesson to you, in case you ever get the notion you don't want to go to church! I sure hope we get some decent neighbors in there after they're gone!"

And, behold, the second family split up and moved away. And the new neighbors were decent people who kept up the house and yard, never smoked or drank or used drugs. They never cursed or fought loudly. Their kids were honor students. The new family even went to church occasionally. And the first family lived happily ever after, never bothered by their neighbors again.

It's just a story, of course. I hope that none of you tried to identify yourselves with that first family, because even though they are Christians, they are not much like the Lord. This family avoided their lost neighbors and rejoiced when they finally moved away. But Jesus socialized with lost sinners and rejoiced when they came to repentance.

The parable is clear as mud, and yet we still doubt God's ability to find us when we are lost. We couldn't possibly think that God would take the initiative when we've chosen to walk away. Because when we hurt our family's feelings, they don't always take the initiative to tell us they forgive us, it takes time and some letting go of resentment to heal those cuts. But God does take the initiative. Jesus shows us in the example of the shepherd and the woman that they realized the problem and took the initiative to deal with it. They both began searching for the lost item. The lost sheep and the lost coin were passive in the process, they weren't running away. The only reason they were found is that the shepherd and the woman diligently searched for them.

There's one point though that these parables make that troubles us greatly. The shepherd goes after one sheep. The woman hunts diligently for a single coin. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep by name. He calls them individually to come. He cares about every lost sinner who needs repentance. He cares for you. Not just the good Christian beside you. God cares for you. For you are found in Christ.

On a cold night in England many decades ago, a group of children slipped into a church to get warm. The preacher was speaking on Luke 15:2, which in the King James Version reads, *This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*

Afterwards, one of the children, a girl of 8, went up to the pastor and said, "Pardon me, sir, but I didn't know that my name was in the Bible." He asked, "What is your name?" "Edith, sir." "No," he said, "Edith is not in the Bible." "Yes, it is," she replied. "I heard you say, 'This man receiveth sinners, and Edith with them.'" (In "Our Daily Bread.")

Even though that girl misunderstood the text, she had applied the truth personally to her own heart. If you know that there are sins in your heart that need God's merciful forgiveness, put your name in there. "This man receives sinners, and [Steve] with them." If you will join the tax gatherers and sinners and draw near to Jesus and listen to Him, you will know the joy of singing: "I once was lost, but now I'm found!"