

Trinity III

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[0 : 01] There is much talk today about finding joy and happiness in life. Books, podcasts, and sappy dramas on Netflix all seek to provide us with stories that end in happy thoughts and scenic bliss.

Who doesn't want to be happy? We all long for a sense of fulfillment and meaning in life. The problem with this ambition is not the desire to be happy or find fulfillment.

That is a normal desire on all of our parts. The issue is how we go about seeking happiness. That becomes the potential problem.

We are told today that to be truly happy, we must seek our own good. To heck with others, do what makes you happy.

Live life pursuing your own hopes and dreams and forget about anyone around you. This is where the Christian faith parts ways with the world.

[1 : 14] You see, in essence, that's what Satan whispered in the ears of Eve. You shall have your own knowledge of good and evil, Eve, and you shall be your own God.

Do it, Eve. Do it, Eve. Indulge and enjoy your best life now. Friends, living for self is what leads to alienation and exile.

Exile from God. And we have a whole culture of people scurrying around, seeking their own happiness while ending up in broken marriages, self-medicating, and seeking some type of relief from the anxiety that haunts them on a day-to-day basis.

Here in our gospel text, we read about two types of people. On the one hand, we have the tax collectors and the sinners.

These were the deplorables. They were the backwoods degenerates that were considered unredeemable. They were unclean. And then we have the good old Pharisees and the scribes.

[2 : 31] These were the original virtue signalers. These were the people that made sure everyone conformed to their interpretation of the law and righteousness.

And this is the context of our gospel text this morning. Friends, Jesus is not against joy. As a matter of fact, at the heart of these stories, found in our gospel reading of Luke chapter 15, joy is at the centerpiece of these stories, of the message.

These stories are replete with celebration and much rejoicing. But how we experience joy is different from what the Pharisees and the scribes were teaching.

There wasn't a whole lot of joy in what they were teaching. Joy comes not from pulling oneself up by the bootstraps and sticking to a particular diet or exercise routine.

True joy doesn't come from comparing ourselves to others and seeing how much better we are than those despicable and simple-minded folk. True joy comes from the Savior who desires to embrace each and every one of us with his own love and mercy.

[4 : 02] We read about one lost sheep and one lost coin. The focus of these stories is not on the one that is lost.

The main character of these stories is the one who pursues the lost. Jesus describes an earthly shepherd who tended dirty and not-so-smart sheep.

When the shepherd realizes that one of the sheep has been lost, he diligently pursues that sheep with earnest until he picks up the wayward animal and carries it home on his shoulders.

The shepherd then proclaims, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.

Jesus then tells us the meaning of this story as he says, I say to you likewise, There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the 99 just persons, that is, take note Pharisees and scribes, who need no repentance.

[5 : 16] You see, friends, joy comes from seeking God's help. Trusting in God. Not in trying to convince others that we have it all together.

We are a mess. All of us. We are lost sheep. All of us. We are broken people.

All of us. And we are all dying. But our shepherd has come to bring us true joy, meaning, and fulfillment as we repent and seek to turn away from a do-it-yourself theology that always ends up in alienation and despair to a life of radical humility, throwing ourselves on the mercy of our gracious God.

Our Lord goes from speaking of a wayward sheep or a wayward sheep to now speaking of a woman who loses a silver coin. The woman had ten silver coins, but one was lost.

And she diligently seeks after this lost coin by lighting a lamp and by sweeping the whole house until she finds it. And when she does finally find it, she tells her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which was lost.

[6 : 54] And Jesus then says, Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

You see, God is not some cosmic killjoy. He's not. He is a God who delights. He's a God who rejoices in his people.

He delights in the one who turns from their own self-righteous ambitions and dreams to finding their true delight in him.

It's when we turn from self to God, that is when we find true meaning in life. So how do we experience true fulfillment in life?

Well, it's not in lecturing the world to be more like us. Because the reality is, we're all a complete mess. Instead, it's by living a life of surrender to God.

[8 : 08] It's by surrendering our pride to God. And in humility, admitting that we do not have it all figured out. But we trust the one who does.

You see, God is calling us wayward sheep and treasured vessels to come home to him. He seeks us out in his mercy, and he offers us a new home with other sinners, as well as with the angels.

We can rejoice once we finally admit, I am broken, I am in need of help, and I feel all alone.

That help is found only in the arms of Jesus, our shepherd. He is the one who carries us home by placing us on his shoulders.

And that is putting us in to the church, his body. The great Saint Ambrose of Milan, around 4th century, makes an interesting observation to three of the stories here in Luke chapter 15.

[9 : 32] He notes that the parable of the prodigal son, which we did not hear, that comes in a couple weeks, speaks of the father who loves and embraces his prodigal.

And we are all the prodigal in that story. He embraces his wayward children. The parable of the one lost sheep, speaks of the good shepherd, Jesus, who seeks out the one lost sheep.

And not only does he seek out, but he lays down his life for the sheep. And the parable of the lost coin, speaks of the woman, who diligently searches and finds that lost coin.

And according to Saint Ambrose, the woman is the church, guided by the light of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Augustine, who was a pupil of Saint Ambrose, really captures, I think, the essence of what we heard here in Luke chapter 15.

[10 : 45] Saint Augustine says, our hearts are restless, and they will remain that way until we find our final rest in thee, in God.

Not in stuff, not in image, not in the culture, in God. beloved, beloved, our home is with God.

It's not in the mirage of happiness that is flaunted before our eyes, which only brings despair.

Therefore, dearly beloved, it's time for all of us to repent.

It's time for all of us to acknowledge we don't have it all figured out, we're a mess. It's time for us to cry out, we need help, so that our gracious and most merciful God can fill us with his everlasting joy and peace and the angels celebrate glory to God on high.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.