

Trinity III

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 01] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. The reading for this morning's Gospel contains two parables, but in my opinion, it might as well as contain three.

In Luke chapter 15, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, which are both a part of this morning's Gospel reading, are immediately followed up by the parable of the lost son, or more commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son, which is not a part of this morning's Gospel reading, but probably should be, since all three focus on the same message.

For all three of these parables are very similar, in that each one focuses on our Lord's love for the lost. In all three parables, the protagonist loses something or someone of great value.

The shepherd loses a sheep, the woman loses a coin, and the father loses a son. But in each case, when that something or someone of great value is found, the protagonist rejoices, and calls together his friends and his neighbors to rejoice with him, for that which was lost is found.

Now, to put these three parables in their proper perspective, Luke chapter 15 begins with these words, Then all the tax collectors and sinners drew near to Jesus to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

[1 : 52] So right from the very beginning of our Gospel text, our Gospel text presents us with two groups of people. The first group is the tax collectors and sinners.

The second group is the scribes and Pharisees. In our Lord's day, the first group was looked upon as a bunch of godless sinners. And then the second group was looked upon as a bunch of righteous and God-fearing men.

So the first group needed to repent, while it was more commonly believed at that time that the second group, the scribes and Pharisees, needed no such repentance.

This is why the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin end with our Lord saying this, There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

And this is also why the parable of the lost or prodigal son also ends with the father rebuking the prodigal son's brother when he says, It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead but is alive again.

[3 : 07] He was lost, but now he is found. In other words, Our Lord was trying to teach the scribes and Pharisees how ministry is supposed to be done.

And ministry is not supposed to be done the way the scribes and the Pharisees had done it in the past, which is why they rebuked our Lord when he sought after the tax collectors and sinners.

But ministry is not supposed to be like that. Ministry is not supposed to be all of us just sitting around, serving ourselves, admiring how holy we are, and looking down upon others.

No. That is the way the scribes and Pharisees did ministry. But our God does not want us to be selfish. The Lord doesn't want our ministry to be all about ourselves.

He wants us instead to follow his example and to strive to serve others. And that, that is truly a lot, lot more difficult than most Christians even realize.

[4 : 22] Listen, over the years, I have heard a lot of Christians talk and brag about their churches and about how much they get from the worship services and the social programs and all the like.

And honestly, that's great. I'm glad. I'm glad people are getting something from worship and their church. But is that really what worship and Christian ministry is all about?

What we get out of it? How it makes us feel? I mean, can worship and ministry be difficult or boring and still be extremely beneficial?

Is Holy Communion just about the forgiveness of our sins, what we get out of it? Or is celebrating Mass also about what God has done and is continuing to do for the entire world?

The same Anglican priest who once told me that peanut butter story that so many of you heard last Sunday is the same priest who once told me that true ministry happens when ministry stops being fun.

[5 : 44] And I think there's a lot of truth to that. Good parenting happens when parents stop doing whatever they want and start doing some difficult things they really don't want to do.

Good marriages happen when spouses stop thinking about themselves and start sacrificing their own wants, their own desires, and their own ways of doing things for the benefit of the other. And good friendships are often not made in the presence of great comfort and ease, but are made and last in the presence of true adversity and trial.

I mean, do we think that the shepherd in this morning's parable enjoyed searching all day and night for that one lost sheep?

Or do we think that he thought it was fun carrying that heavy sheep upon his shoulders in the heat of the day all the way back to the flock?

[6 : 50] Or do we think that woman enjoyed spending all night frantically searching for that one lost coin? Or was the father having any fun terrorlessly hoping, praying, and waiting for his lost son to return home?

No. None of that was easy. And it all was a lot of work, but it was good. It was good.

For the joy of heaven is not found in the satisfaction of self. The joy of heaven is founding in serving another.

And this is what the scribes and Pharisees didn't practice, but of what our Lord was trying to teach them and trying to teach all of us today.

For to know God, to know God is to love the lost. And that is a joy and a reward all unto itself. For that is how good continues to get done in the world.

[8 : 05] when that which was lost is finally found. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.