

The Third Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 15:1-10: "You Matter to God."
June 19/20, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, we all like sheep have gone astray, having allowed ourselves to be led away from the right path by Satan and our own sinful flesh. We beseech You graciously to forgive us all our sins for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ; and enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may abide in Your Word, and in true repentance and a steadfast faith continue in Your Church unto the end, and obtain eternal salvation; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 158)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." / So He told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. / "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who came to save the whole world, which means He came to save you, dear fellow redeemed:

A little over a week ago, some people were able to witness a solar eclipse (June 10). This is when the moon passes between the sun and the earth, casting the moon's shadow over the earth. When this happens, it appears that the sun and the moon are exactly the same size. But of course they are not even close to the same size. The diameter of the sun is actually 400 times larger than the diameter of the moon, and the sun is 400 times further away from the earth.

In a similar way, with one hand I can block the light of the sun; I can make the sun disappear from my sight. I could even do this with a little coin if I closed one eye and held the coin in front of my other eye. But that doesn't make my hand or a little coin bigger than the sun. It would be

a mistake to think that because the sun is small from our perspective that it is not all that powerful or important. We know that without the sun, life could not exist on earth.

But as impressive and essential as the sun is, that great burning star is nothing compared to the mighty God. The sun did not create itself; God created it, along with all the stars and planets and everything else on earth. But many people think of God as very small, if they think of Him at all. "Maybe there is some god up there, way far away," they say, "but as far as I'm concerned, my fate is in my own hands." They don't think that God matters. The coin in their hand seems bigger to them than God.

Have you ever watched little children play hide-and-seek? They figure that as long as they can't see anyone, then no one can see them. Children will often hide in plain view with a blanket covering them or maybe even just with their hands over their eyes. Just because we can't see God does not mean that God can't see us. Just because He looks small from our perspective, does not mean that He is small.

It can appear that a coin in my hand is larger than the sun. The reality is that the sun is so large it could hold 1.3 million of our earths. It can appear that God is very small and insignificant. The reality is that He has power over all things and fills all things, and without Him we could not "*live and move and have our being*" (Act. 17:28).

That is an intimidating thought. We like to think that we have the power, that we are in control. We want to make the decisions. We want to go our own way. And God does allow us a great deal of latitude. He is not a puppet master tugging on all the strings. He gives us food to eat, water to drink, and air to breathe. But He does not force us to do exactly what He wants.

That sounds like a pretty good deal, except that we do not always use our freedom in the best ways. We get ourselves in all sorts of trouble because we imagine we are bigger than we actually are. We think we can take care of ourselves. We think we can succeed where so many others have failed. But then we fail too.

God told us to watch what we say or it would come back to haunt us. And we went ahead and said it. He told us not to touch that because it would burn us. And we touched it. He told us not to go there because all we would find is pain. And we went. How would you respond if you were in God's place? Maybe you would wonder if human beings are worth all the trouble. Maybe you would turn your back on them saying, "I gave them plenty of chances, and they blew it."

But that is not what God does. He seeks after us when we wander. He picks us up when we fall. He carries us through the pain we brought on ourselves. This is what Jesus illustrates in the two parables for today. A crowd of people had gathered around Him—people who did not have good reputations. They were "*tax collectors and sinners.*" Tax collectors were despised because they assisted the Romans and often exacted higher taxes than they had to. The "*sinners*" were any who were known to live contrary to God's holy law, who did not take the Scriptures seriously.

These were the people Jesus was spending time with, and the Pharisees and the scribes noticed. The Pharisees and scribes were very serious about the law. They thoroughly studied God's commands and thought they had done a good job at keeping them. They were offended to see Jesus visiting with such bad people: *"This Man receives sinners and eats with them,"* they grumbled.

So then Jesus told them about the hundred sheep, and how one of them wandered off. The shepherd goes searching for that sheep to rescue it from danger and bring it home safely. Then He told them about ten silver coins, and how a woman looks all over the house for one that was lost until she finds it. And what was His point? *"[T]here will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."* *"There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

His purpose in visiting with the *"tax collectors and sinners"* was to lead them to repentance. It was not to confirm them in their sin. So many today get this wrong about Jesus. They point to the company He kept and say, *"See! This shows that Jesus does not judge people for their sins! He supports them! He accepts them just the way they are!"* But that is not what Jesus was doing. He was not encouraging them to continue in their sins. He was gently and patiently leading them to understand how they had gone wrong, and He was calling them to receive His grace and forgiveness for all their sins.

This is not how the scribes and Pharisees dealt with the tax collectors and sinners. They shunned them. They looked down their noses at them. They saw them as hopeless cases. God does not see sinners this way. He does not see them as a lost cause. But He does say that all of us are lost by nature. All of us need to be sought out and found by Him because all of us have broken His law and are trapped in our sins. There is no person alive today who has no need to repent.

We have not even come close to keeping the law of God. There are only ten Commandments, and we have violated each Commandment over and over again. We can tell ourselves that we can do whatever we please – we don't have to answer to anyone. But a coin doesn't really block out the sun. And our bravado and our pride doesn't really make us bigger than God.

As many times bigger as the sun is to a coin, God is infinitely bigger than us. He could crush us just as easily as we could crush a tiny bug with our foot. But He is not interested in destroying us. God the Father sent His only Son to save us. He sent Him down to us from the highest heavens, all the way down to our lowly earth. God's Son took on our flesh. He was an embryo in the virgin Mary's womb. He developed and grew and was born a little baby in a little town.

When He grew up and reached adulthood, He began to gather the lost sheep and the lost coins through His preaching and teaching. *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* He said (Mat. 4:17). A Savior had come! A Savior for sinners! A Savior for you! Jesus did not sin. He did not take the wrong path. He did not do anything He regretted. He lived a perfect life under the law, so He could credit that perfection to you.

And He took all your sins on Himself, all the sins of the whole world, and He took them to the cross. There He suffered and died for every sin. There He made complete payment for your sins

by shedding His holy blood. He did this because He was not content to lose even one sheep or one coin. He was not content to lose you.

This great Savior, our great Lord, sees you. He knows the sins that trouble your conscience. He knows the guilt that burdens you. He sees the sin that stains you. And He forgives it all. He does not turn you away because you are not good enough for Him. He takes away your sin and covers you in His righteousness, so you are good enough. You have everything you need to get to heaven because Jesus has freely provided all of it.

You are far below God by nature. You are a tiny speck of dust in His kingdom. But He loves you. He lifts you out of the dirt and despair of your sins, and He gives you a share in His glory and a place at His side. You may be just a small part of this vast universe, but you are not small to Him. You may be insignificant in the world, but **You Matter to Him**.

And if you matter to the God who reigns over heaven and hell, over life and death, and if He promises you life with Him for all eternity, then that's all that matters.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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