

Welcome

Announcements: Giving Options-Special Offering for the month of September Jerome Food Bank; Newcomers class after worship today; Cookies needed for hospitality; Angel's attic needs help with set up, clean up, baked goods- sign up in the foyer; United Women in Faith potluck this Tuesday at 11:30AM. All ladies invited; Bible Study Continues on Wednesday evenings.

Fellowship of Love Song

Call to Worship

L: The heavens are telling the glory of God.

P: The firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

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L: Day pours forth speech,

P: and night declares knowledge of our God.

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L: God's wisdom is written in stars.

P: It is seen and heard to the ends of the earth.

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L: When we see God's teachings in the clouds,

P: or hear them in the symphonies of the birds,

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L: our minds are enriched,

P: our eyes are enlightened,

L: our souls are revived,

P: and our hearts rejoice.

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L: Then we shall bless God's name with our words,

P: and with the silence between them.

Call to Worship

**O God, your Wisdom speaks in our streets, cries out from our intersections,
and calls our names.**

Wisdom hopes we will stop...listen...and learn.

Wisdom beseeches us to turn our faces and our ears to you.

Wisdom urges us to bless your name with our speaking...and our silence.

May we speak and bless your name, O God, now and always. Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Offering

Special Music

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.

² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

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³ So he told them this parable:

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⁴ "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

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⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

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⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.'

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⁷ 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.

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⁸ "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?

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⁹ 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.'

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¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

L: The word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Radical Love and Acceptance

Not to long ago I preached on the third parable in this section of Luke, which would be the story of the prodigal son. I know one of the things I reflected on is how difficult this type of passage is to preach on because the material itself is so familiar for people. These two stories are no different. Those of us who have grown up in the church know these stories rather intimately. Who hasn't heard the story of the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep to search for the one missing, or of the woman who searches for the lost coin and then celebrates with her neighbor when the coin is found?

Let me just say "familiarity breeds contentment." While this may not be bad in a marriage relationship, sometimes it's great to be content with

the person you are with and not be seeking to change them. It can also be damaging, where contentment means we take advantage of our partner because we assume they will always do what we expect of them, or we expect things and don't thank them and appreciate them.

The familiarity of this passage means for most of us that we are comfortable with what we believe the scripture to be saying or how we have been taught on what this scripture means. My goal today is not to give you some profound new understanding of the passage, I mean if it happens, that's great, but I don't have the time nor the inclination to try and say something clever about a passage you already have strong opinions and attachments to. Instead, what I want to do today is help you see different aspects of this passage more clearly. I think that if you see the scripture more clearly it may help you to either understand it or appreciate it in a better light.

Where we need to start with in this passage is at the beginning. Notice how the scene is set "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to him..."

Notice that this is not about what Jesus is saying or doing. Jesus isn't preaching or teaching some big idea, Jesus is just hanging out and he's apparently the type of person that the tax collectors and sinners move closer to so they can listen to him. I want to give another little aside here, that is the term "sinner" this implies a person who is living habitually in sin. Not a one off, I stole a pen once so I'm a sinner. This is more like a person who you would say was living in habitual sin, living unmarried together or "shacking up." Not that I personally consider that much of a sin, I know for some people it does.

So, Jesus is hanging out and these people, really fringe type people come to get closer to him, to hang out and be with him. I don't know about you but that tells me that Jesus was probably a fun person to be around.

What happens next is that the Pharisees and Scribes start grumbling. Notice they are not arguing with Jesus, the text doesn't even say why they were there in the first place. Jesus doesn't even ask for their two cents, but that doesn't stop them from adding their two cents. Like many religious people, they just don't know how to leave others alone and keep to themselves. If they are unhappy - they need everyone else to know that they are unhappy. I know that you know what I'm talking about. I've seen it in every church and among many Christians. And I am sure you have as well.

Let's not fixate on that though, let's move into our story. So, Jesus responds as he often does, he tells a story, two in fact. The first story he talks about a shepherd leaving 99 sheep, and then he talks about a woman searching for a lost coin. There are some important things to note about this story. First is, we are not the lost sheep nor are we the coin. You see, this story isn't about us, it isn't about the sin in our lives, and it isn't about our commitment to Christ. In fact, this story shows just the opposite. This is a story about God.

In both stories God is the principle actor. God is the shepherd; God is the woman. It is God that sees that something is missing, and it is God that goes out to find the missing item. In other words, this isn't you realizing that you are a sinner and seeking to be saved. Think about it, what does a sheep do when it's scared and separated from the heard? It hides and remains silent; it can't call out for help and tell the shepherd where it is. We see that point made even more importantly with the coin. The coin isn't sentient; it's not the famous "talking" coin of Jerusalem. It is lost and the woman has to search for it. Jesus is dealing with the attitudes of the Pharisees and Scribes, grumbling over the people on the margins of their lives coming close to hear and spend time with Jesus. And Jesus

reminds them that God came to find those individuals, not to find the already religious.

Now I could spend more time talking about that and I think it is important to mention or else I wouldn't have. This passage is at least partly about how God isn't here for us in the church; God is reminding us that there is nothing special about following God. It's like I say about joining the church, there aren't any perks to membership, it's about greater discipleship responsibilities. I want to move away from this point though and go back to what we were talking about before.

I feel it is most important for us to understand that *God is* the initiator of our salvation not us. This is not to say we don't have a responsibility, or that we aren't called to follow Christ. But I sometimes think that we focus too much on "God did this for you" that we forget God is still searching for those that we have left out of the church. You see God isn't in here, God is out there. God leaves us and goes out to include others. We would do well to remember that. You see it isn't just about us confessing our sins or about us seeking God it's about God's never-failing love and grace for those who have been excluded and rejected from our circles.

I think this passage is a warning. Not a warning in the sense that if we don't listen we will be in trouble. But a warning to remember that God is here for everyone, and God is searching for everyone, everywhere. You can't stop that, you can't stop who God has accepted even, or perhaps especially if you think it is a sin. Because to God that doesn't matter. God has left everything to search for that one. Is it you? Are you the one God is searching for? It is too easy for us to think God agrees with us and is only here for us, but this passage shows this idea is not true. God is here for everyone, yes that includes us but perhaps more importantly it includes those who we would exclude.

Message for Sunday, September 14, 2025
Scripture: Luke 15:1-10
Message Title: Radical Love and Acceptance

That gives me hope. You see because its not about me and my sins, it's not about confessing my sins or living up to some standard of Christian perfection that I will never be able to accomplish. It's about living up to the radical love and acceptance of God because nothing else matters. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song

Goodbye- Remember to stay behind for the new members class.