

## **“Rejoice, you are found!” Luke 15:1-10**

**1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> 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.' <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> "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? <sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

Whenever Jesus tells parables they are so pregnant with a meaning that we can talk and talk and talk about different thoughts and perspectives that Jesus teaches us. This time our Gospel reading contains two of Jesus parables, both of them probably among the most well know. The parable about the lost sheep and the parable about the lost coin. The first one should be very well known to you.

We'll limit our today's meditation with three questions. What do these parables teach about us? What do these parables teach about Jesus? And what is the reason for us to come together here in the Lord's house? Thus we'll talk about us, about Jesus, and about the reason why we are here.

Luke describes the setting in which Jesus told these parables with the following words. „Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.” And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Here Luke describes two groups of people, or better two ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, the tax collectors and sinners. On the other hand the Pharisees and the scribes. The tax collectors and the sinners, they were drawing near to hear what Jesus was teaching. The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling because Jesus was receiving sinners and was eating with them.

Let us talk a little bit about these two groups, two ends of the spectrum, because we need to understand the context for these Jesus parables. The Pharisees and the scribes were the best people in that society. I mean it. They really were. Why, you may wonder?

Because they really believed the Word of God. They read it, they studied it, they meditated upon it, they discussed it, and they truly tried to live according to it. They were not hypocrites in a sense that they just pretended to be pious people, when in fact they cared much more about other things. No!

They believed the Bible and they tried to live accordingly. They worked so hard not to sin. We could learn from them a lot. There are testimonies telling that the Pharisees seeing beautiful women could move to the other side of the street and if it didn't help, they could even hit their heads against a wall just to get rid of their seductive thoughts.

They took the Word of God seriously. For them it was a matter of life and death. What they didn't understand was the depth of our sin. They thought that by doing their best they have done enough to have God's favor. That they are righteous if they works look righteous. They forgot about their hearts.

What were these sinners and the tax collectors? Don't be deceived! They were real sinners. Not some nice people who were just laughing saying that 'O, I have sinned, I ate too much of ice cream, or, I slept till the noon, or, yesterday I had too many beers.'

They were real sinners. Talking about women the word 'sinner' often meant a prostitute. The tax collectors were despised by everyone. They usually were man from among the Jews, but they served Romans collecting taxes from all who wanted to sell their produce. It wasn't a noble profession. They were stripping their own brothers, because of their greed, and did it under the protection of Roman occupants. Decadent, greedy, selfish, sexually immoral... these are good adjectives to describes those sinners.

No surprise that that the Pharisees were grumbling. The reason is the fact that Jesus not only accepted invitations from this kind of people and ate with them, but He also, as we can understand from this text, extended His hospitality to them.

We know that to have a meal together is much more than just to have a food together. We don't invite anyone to our meals. We invite those whom we respect, whom we treat as our friends, to whom we want to show our appreciation. Jesus was not partial, he ate both with the Pharisees and with the sinners. For He saw their hearts and there was no difference between the one end of the spectrum and the other.

It was very difficult thing for the Pharisees and the scribes to swallow. But don't rush to judge them, just think for a moment, how would we look upon someone who would associate with this type of sinners? What would be our reaction? Joy or rather annoyance?

And here we come to Jesus answer to their grumbling, to these two parables: the parable about the lost sheep and the lost coin. They explain Jesus actions, why He went to all – to those with a good reputation and to those with a bad.

Jesus portrays this situation where a man, having a hundred sheep, has lost one and now leaves other ninety nine in open country and goes after this one, until he finds it. Then he puts it on his shoulders, rejoicing, brings it home, where all his friends and neighbors rejoice. Another parable is about the woman who had lost one of her ten coins and then lights a lamp, sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it.

**What do these parables tell about us?** Who are we in these parables? I guess, that's quite obvious, - we are the lost sheep and we are the lost coins. But what it tells about us? I'm quite sure you know much more about the sheep than I do. You should be explaining all the details to me. But here is at least a little bit.

The sheep are not too smart. The sheep don't have a good eyesight. Their hearing is good, and they try to listen where others are, or in Jesus times, they tried to listen to the voice of their shepherd. What happens to a sheep when she gets lost?

When a sheep gets lost, when she is alone, she falls into despair. She tries to run around and bleat, but because of the enormous stress she rapidly loses her strengths. Soon the only thing she is capable of doing is to lay on the ground and bleat, hoping that someone will come and find her. Sometimes predators come first... But sheep doesn't have any strength left to resist.

This is our condition before the Son of God, the Good Shepherd comes to rescue us. We are totally hopeless when it comes to our salvation, to our rescue from the power of sin and death. Without our Good Shepherd, we have neither ideas what to do, nor abilities to do anything for our salvations.

What a shame, we all are created for so much more: to rejoice in God's presence and to enjoy His blessings, gladly serving all people in our lives, as God's coworkers, as His beloved children. What a shame the we have lost it!

When we look at the parable of the lost coin the situation is similar. Is there anything that this coin could do to be found? No, of course not. Put it differently, does coin even know that it is lost? No, of course not. When Jesus replies to the Pharisees and the scribes He makes it very clear what is our condition. For entire spectrum. We all are like the lost sheep. Before we *are found* by our Good Shepherd, we are lost and doomed to death.

What is significant, those who try to be a good people, according to their own standards, who belong to the good end of the spectrum, they usually don't even realize that they are lost. They seem to be doing pretty well, and there is no need Savior. To save them from what, or from whom? From good and more or less moral life?

But as almost everyone has experienced, and it happen with your pastor this week, there comes a situation, when suddenly we are tested and we fail. We sin, we make choices and do things, we clearly know are not acceptable.

As apostle Paul wrote: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." (1Co 10:12) We slip even not noticing how and why it did happen. But suddenly we are not anymore at the good end of the spectrum, but among the sinners. I guess we all know the feeling.

These are at least few things we can learn about us in the context of Jesus mission. **What can we learn about Jesus?** What does this parable teach about Him? He is the one who is looking for the lost sheep, He is the one who is looking for the lost coin.

The man leaves the ninety nine to go after this one. It is not surprising. It is not the case that He doesn't care about others. Usually with a flock this big there were more than just one shepherd. Even if this is not mentioned in this parable, Jesus listeners would assume that there were others who stayed with the flock and brought it back home.

We are used to see particular depictions of shepherds and the lost sheep in Western art. Can you recall what are they? Nice, young lad with a little lamb, like a pet, on his arms, or sometimes on His shoulders. Smiling and bringing it home. How much does this depiction correspond to reality? It seems quite obvious that these artists knew a little about sheep. Or that reality didn't matter for their art.

Then imagine another picture, man trying to carry a mature sheep. Let's pray it's not a Merino ram! How heavy would she be? 40kg, may be even 50kg or 60kg? The landscape in Palestine was very similar to what we have here in Barossa. Hills and valleys, at some places hillsides were quite steep and rocky.

We read that "when he has found it, namely, the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." When the man found the lost sheep, she probably was already without the strength. How to get her home? Trying to persuade? Trying to tell how good sheep behave? Trying to command her to move? She is laying and is unable to walk. The only solution is to lift her up and to carry her to home.

He lays her on His shoulders, rejoicing. We can easily imagine that this wasn't an easy task. To carry a sheep from far away in hill country back to home, whatever far it was, few hundred meters or several kilometers. It was a difficult and demanding task. It required strength and determination.

It is similarly with us, when we lay down, overcome by our sin and unable to do anything to make things good with God. We have lost the wonderful glory God had given us. Now it is not enough for us to know that God's law expects us not to sin. It is not enough to tell us what is the right way to live. All prisons are full with people who know what is right and what is wrong. And what?

Almost every person in our society of sexual promiscuity, cohabitation and divorce knows what is right and what is wrong. So what? What does it change if you know it, but if you are not able to live this way. We can't change our hearts. Only the Son of God, Jesus Christ, can rescue us. Only He can sacrifice Himself to bring us home, and only His love can change our heart. Not instructions for a good life.

So what do we learn about Jesus? If we are the sheep and He is the Shepherd, what does this parable tell about Him? He is ready to go after every single lost sheep. After each of us. He is ready to search for us, as the woman searched for the coin. He is ready to rescue us, even if it is difficult and costly.

When He finds the sheep, when He finds you, He rejoices. Yes, you, whatever lost you may be. You can never be too lost for Him. There is no way too far or too difficult for Jesus if only

He can bring you home. He is not afraid or hesitant to carry you. He rejoices about every lost sheep, or lost coin that is found again.

He said: "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." It's not the case that these ninety nine don't need to repent, but that they think that they don't need. Therefore, of course, there is a larger joy over one, who finally acknowledges that there is a need for repentance and a need for Savior. For only when we understand it, we are willing to accept the help of God.

One more question remains: **why are we here in the Lord's house?** For what purpose? It is very simple. To rejoice! Yes, to rejoice and celebrate. We all are like the sheep from the parable, or like the lost coins. The only reason we are here is that our Good Shepherd has found us. He did it. We didn't find Him, we didn't find our way here. We all were found and brought into the Lord's house for the heavenly feast.

He went out and found us where we were laying. He lifted us up when we were lost, and He carries us to our ultimate home. Don't be fooled. We are not walking into God's Kingdom on our own. Not even now. We are being carried. Daily, and it is not easy task for the Son of God. But He rejoices.

Sometime we can be like little children; we can't walk on our own yet, but we can wrestle furiously again this one who tries to carry us. We often do. But we are here in spite of it. That's a reason for our joy and celebration. Jesus has found us, He has carried us, and He wants to have this meal together with us.

He is our Shepherd, He is your Shepherd. He has rescued us, He has rescued you. He is our host and He welcomes us at His table, whatever we are according to our own opinion, the Pharisees or the sinners. He is not partial. He has brought you here, just come and celebrate!

Amen.