

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – 11 September 2022

Luke 15: 1-11

In the last chapter, we saw Jesus had been invited to have a meal with a leader of Pharisees. The Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus for associating with social outcasts, people like the tax collectors and sinners who flocked to him. Now Pharisees and scribes are grumblings because Jesus eats with sinners tax collectors and outcasts. Jesus enjoyed table fellowship with them and even hosted the meal for them.

Pharisees are certain of their goodness; they assume others fall outside the circle of salvation. Jesus makes clear that everyone falls within the shadow of salvation, regardless of who they are. The question posed by the parable is whether we will join in the celebration- to celebrate with God one must also share in God's mercy. Pharisees' righteousness had become a barrier separating them from God's mercy and love. Their righteousness did not make God happy.

In this parable, the sheep foolishly wanders off. There is no malicious intent, just unintentional stupidity that leads to being lost and far from home, with no sense of how to get back. The coin just slips in the cracks, misplaced and forgotten by others. The lost coin reflects the overlooked and forgotten in our society.

Both parables focus sharply on God's joy at the recovery of what had been lost, rejoicing calls for celebration. The emphasis is on the joy of recovery, not on the need for repentance. However, the latter is not denied, but in this context, emphasis is on the joy of God at those who respond to God's mercy.

Neither the sheep nor coin can repent, but the parable aims not at calling sinners to repentance but at calling the righteous to join the celebration. Whether one will join the celebration is important because it reveals whether our relationships are based on our merit or god's mercy.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees grumbling exposes the bitterness whenever we feel that God is too good to others and not good enough to us. Typically, we want mercy in our judgment for others, but the parable calls us to celebrate with God. Only those who can celebrate God's grace can experience that mercy themselves.

God cares about all things. God can transform any situation. God lovingly created the entire world. God tends it with care and compassion. God wants justice, hospitality, and healing, and we can be God's partners in this process of healing the world. All God's children are welcome at the table. The God who loves all is welcoming everyone and inviting us to join the celebration. Love is shown to the least, the weakest, the most vulnerable, that is when we remember the song of God's love deep in our hearts and we know without a doubt that God loves us just the very same way.

Amen.