

## Sermon Transcript for Third Sunday after Trinity, June 20, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right. We're going to focus a lot on the Gospel because there is a lot to unpack in this. We have three parables that Jesus spoke. Now, it's interesting He is spending time with tax collectors and sinners and the Pharisees and the scribes grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." The question is, why are they grumbling? Why are the Pharisees and the scribes grumbling? Jesus is there having compassion on the tax collectors and sinners. And it would seem to us who understand the nature of God, that that's exactly why He came: to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And that is the same thing that He has done throughout all of history. From the beginning, He has saved us. He has promised us His salvation. He has desired us to know His grace and mercy, and yet still the Pharisees and the scribes, the ones who in theory are supposed to know and understand the Word of God are grumbling and complaining. And part of this is because they think of themselves as the "chosen people". And they figure if Jesus is indeed a prophet of God, that He ought to be spending His time with them, with the righteous and the holy ones, not with the riff-raff out there that nobody likes or cares about.

Sadly enough, sometimes we have the same attitude ourselves. And the story of the prodigal son, and I think also the quote-unquote "faithful son," whether we're on one side or the other, we hear a little bit of condemnation, but the ultimate thing that we need to understand in all of this is that God loves us so much, that we have never actually been enemies of God. We have been in the enemy's camp and we have been in his power. The devil, the world and the sinful nature that is within us, those are the enemies. But we are not the enemies of God. We've always been part of His family and part of His kingdom. And He hates it when we are in the clutches of His enemy: sin and death and the devil. And so He always desires to have us come into His kingdom, to know and understand the love and grace that He has for us.

And so He starts out these parables to help the Pharisees and the scribes understand what it is that He's all about. He starts out with the parable of the shepherd and the sheep, and it's 100 to one, or 99 and one. So there's 99 who are okay, who got it figured out, who are safe in the confines of the pen or with the shepherd they're following after. But there's this one that goes off and the shepherd goes to seek the one. Now, it's interesting, with 100 sheep, this is more than one man can handle. The 100 sheep is enough for a full village. So we're talking about village's worth of sheep. This guy has a lot of sheep that he is taking care of. So he would have several people under him. Now, if he's the rich person in the community and he's hired these shepherds to watch his sheep, it seems at least humanly speaking, unlikely that he would be the one that goes searching after the one. He'd send the other guys, "Go and find my sheep and bring them back," because it's not an easy task to bring back a lost sheep. As I've come to hear about sheep, not only are we a little bit dumb and foolish, we're also scared stiff when we get out of our comfort zone. So the sheep, when he gets lost, does not like a good dog or a cat find its way home. "Oh, I'm lost. I need to find my way home. Let's go figure out where I'm going and try and find my way home." No. Sheep just stands there frozen. "Okay, I'm lost. I don't recognize anything in my environment, so I'm just going to sit here and cry and wail because that's all I know how to do."

And how often do we, when we get into trouble, when we find ourselves at a loss, when we realize that we have wandered from the path of God, how often do we just sit there and wallow in our own misery? We might say, "Woe is me. Why is this happening to me?" And we might complain to our friends and neighbors, and we might just have a little pity party with ourselves. We sit. We're lost. We're in a situation that we cannot handle

or we've sinned and we've fallen short of the glory of God. And we just say, "I can't do this. I don't know what to do." And we just stay there rather than going and confessing our sins and hearing the mercy of God and His grace. We hide. "Well, I don't want to admit. Really, I did that? Seriously, I mean, I know that that was wrong. I knew it was wrong when I did it and yet I still did it. And I just don't quite want to admit to God that I did it." So we just sit and we bleat.

And then finally, when the shepherd does find the sheep that is lost, does that sheep go running to the shepherd and lick his face and be all happy and joyful, "I've been found," and then follow the shepherd back? No. Again, the sheep is still frozen. Doesn't do anything, cannot do anything, is petrified in the fear, has to be picked up by the shepherd and stuck on his shoulders and carried back to home and safety because the sheep will not follow the shepherd even when they see the shepherd right there, because it's lost and confused and scared. And so it has no power in and of itself. So the shepherd goes and finds the sheep that was lost. And it's interesting, he rejoices when he finds it. But really? Now comes the hard work. Now he's got to lift the dumb sheep on his shoulders, walk the 2, 3, 4, how many ever miles it takes to get back to where the pen is, where the safety is and put the sheep back with the others.

And our Savior does that because He loves us. He rejoices when He finds us. He rejoices even though He has to bear our load. It's what Micah says, here in the very beginning. It says that He has compassion on us and He will tread our iniquities under foot. He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea. He shows faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham. Why? Because He delights in His steadfast love for us. He delights in it even though He has to bear our sins and He has to bear us up.

So we have 99 and one, and then the next parable we have nine and one. So we go from 100 down to 10. It's getting a little more close and a little more intimate. This is the parable of the woman who has the 10 silver coins and she loses one of them. And then she lights a lamp and goes searching all the corners until she can find that coin that was lost. Now, oftentimes this parable has been interpreted that we have lost something valuable, which is our salvation, and we need to diligently search after it and find it. In other words, it's been used as an exhortation: "You've got to try harder!" because you've lost something of value and you need to find it. And it's worth it because it's valuable. That's not what this parable is about. This parable is actually about we are the lost coin and we are hidden in the shadows. Silver coin, when it's nice and clean and new, is all bright and shiny. But after it's been through the wringer a few times and passed across a few hands, it gets dull and dirty. It accumulates the dust and the dirt and the grime of this world. And so when it gets lost, it could be very difficult to find because we've been covered in the grime of this world and we've been covered with the sin.

Now, it's interesting. First off, we start with a sheep, a live creature. Now we have a coin. Not alive or anything, cannot do anything for itself. But the most interesting thing about this coin is a coin is always stamped, at least in this day, with the image of the ruler. That's how you knew it was a coin to the kingdom because it was stamped with the image of the king or lord. We also are stamped and imprinted with the image of our God in baptism. We are brought into the kingdom of God and we have His image placed upon us.

And so God is going after what is His own. We are never enemies of God, even though we are covered with the grime of this world and we are hidden and we cannot be found easily. We are not His enemies. We are precious to Him because we have His image upon us. And not just us who are here in this church, but all people. They have the image of God because He created them. Now, theirs is hidden and completely covered, just waiting to be cleaned by the owner and the Lord. And so God rejoices when He finds the coin that was

lost. Not only does He rejoice in this by himself, but also with the sheep, He calls his friends and his neighbors and ask them to rejoice with him, calling us to rejoice with a sinner who was lost and is now found.

He's kind of poking the bear with the Pharisees and the scribes saying, "Look, you ought to be rejoicing. We have met sinners who are lost and they're coming. They're coming to Jesus. They are drawing near to Him which means they are drawing near to God. We ought to rejoice in that." And yet they're still grumbling and complaining. And just to hammer home the point, just to make sure they understand what they are doing and what they need, what they ought to be doing, we come to the final parable.

The prodigal son, which, if you've been listening to me over the course of the three years that I've been here, whenever I come to this parable, I don't like to talk about the prodigal son. I like to talk about the prodigal father, because prodigal means "wanton" and "wasteful." And the son is obviously prodigal. He takes his father's inheritance. And this child is not just being rude, "Dad, I want my inheritance, can you give it to me, please?" He's not just being self-centered and selfish. To a degree, he is actually saying "Dad, I wished you were dead because then I could get your money." I mean, that's what he's saying. When he said, "Dad, I want my inheritance." He's saying, "Can't you die already? I want this stuff for myself. I want to celebrate and be reckless in my living. I want to use my money in wine, women and song. I want to celebrate and I want to take care of me. I want me to be happy and satisfied. I don't care whether you're alive or dead. I just want what's important to me." So he squanders it and he goes off to this foreign country. And at this point, Jesus is drawing people in. The Pharisees and the scribes are kind of going, "Well, is He really calling us out? Where do we fit in all this? I'm not quite sure. I mean, 10 coins? Okay, I get that. The sheep? That's a wonderful parable. It's loving, it's caring. We know our God is loving, but then we get to here, and this son deserves nothing from the father, especially after he squandered everything. To the point where he says, "Okay, he squandered everything, he's got nothing." So then he hires himself out in the field to feed pigs.

And here, everybody is laughing. The scribes, the Pharisees, the tax collectors, the sinners, everybody, because pork is unclean to the Jewish people. It's part of the kosher laws, you do not eat pork. And so here's this young boy who was a snot-nosed brat who insulted his father. And now he's having to feed these unclean pigs. Oh, the irony, and what a joyful irony it is to everybody. Everybody's just going, "Ah, ha! He got what he deserved." Which is true. He did. And yet, what does he do with that? He thinks to himself, what does it say? But when he came to himself, when he came to his senses, he was like, "What in the world was I thinking?" And again, how often do we have that happen in our own lives? We go out on our own lives. We're doing our own thing. We don't really think about God. We're just fat, dumb and happy to a certain degree, but we realize that we're not... Things just aren't going right. Or we realize, "I have fallen far away from my God. I have stopped praying. I've stopped reading my Bible. Maybe I've stopped coming to church on a regular basis. Maybe I have just not really thought about my faith very much. I've just lived my life for my own sake, for the satisfaction of living in my wonderful home and my glorious environment, the wonderful weather that we have here in Florida and all of the entertainment and activities that we can do." And at some point we come to ourselves and we go, "What have I been doing? My life is a wreck. I'm not serving God. I'm not pleasing Him." And so we repent and that's what this man does. He thinks to himself, "Look, even my father's servants have bread. So I'm going to go to my father." And this is where it becomes interesting. He decides he's going to go back to his father. And he says, "I've sinned against you and against God." True. "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." True. And then he says, "Make me like one of your hired servants." And at that, that the father says, "False." He doesn't even let the son say that. The son gets out, "I've sinned against you and against

God." And the father lets him still speak, "Yeah, yeah. That's true, you have. You've confessed. That's good." "I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." "Yes, that is also true. You understand the depth of your sin." But he does not allow the son to dictate the terms of his return to the family.

God dictates those terms. And thank God He does because He's so much more generous than we deserve or even think about. He casts our sins into the sea, into the depths of the sea, where they can no longer be found, the Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the ocean where nobody can get to, that's where our sins are. He throws them out and He gets rid of them.

And the father rejoices: "My son was dead, but now he's alive." Then comes the second son who is in need of the prodigal father as much as a son. Again, remember. "Prodigal" means sort of "wanting" and "wasteful" or "overabundant." And the son was definitely wasteful and overabundant in his spending. But the father also, and more so, is overabundant in his grace and his mercy. He welcomes the child back, even though he was dead to him, even though he rebelled against him, even though he wished the father was dead, the father still welcomes him back and restores him to full rights of son. In other words, this son is going to get his inheritance again. He's squandered the first one and the father restores him and he's still promised an inheritance at the end of it. That's what it means to restore him back to being a son. That's wasteful, that's wanton, that's overabundant, more than we could possibly expect or imagine. And yet, that's how our Father works.

But his older son, I can relate to the older son. The person who does not deserve anything gets all this wonderful stuff. And the son who has been faithful and right, and he's done everything he's supposed to do, he sees him celebrating, and says, "I'm going to have a pity party. I don't like this. That's not fair, it's not right. They did not deserve... They were so wrong, and yet he's having a party for them?" I don't want to even be there. How often do we get jealous or think that we should get what other people have gotten? Or how often do we say: "God, why is this happening to me when that guy doesn't seem to be suffering the way I am? That's not fair. It's not right." We can see ourselves sometimes in the wayward son. And we can see ourselves sometimes in the older son. But to both of them God is generous. And He welcomes them. He says, "Come, come to the feast, come celebrate with us. Your brother was dead and now he's alive. Get out of yourself, get out of your focus of self-worth and come and rejoice with me."

See, God takes the ridiculous and the foolish and the things that are not deserved and He makes them of value. Paul, speaking to Timothy, says "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent." He was the ultimate enemy of God. He had bought into the enemy's plan and he had accepted it as his own. And he was attacking Christians and approving of their deaths. And yet God came to him and took him from death to life. Why? So that he might proclaim that to others, so that we might be confident even someone who has rebelled against God in thought, word and deed, is always welcome into the family of God because our Father is a prodigal Father. He is wanton and wasteful, although He never considers it wanton and wasteful, for He gives his grace freely and abundantly more than we could possibly imagine. And to Him, that is never a waste because He loves all of us, the wayward sons and the faithful sons. He loves us all. And all of us are forgiven by his grace and mercy. And our sins are tossed into the depths of the sea never to be seen again.

May that grace and that mercy and that hope, and that promise, be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.