

September 11, 2016      Pentecost 17

Luke 15: 1-10 'It Just Doesn't Make Sense'

When I was a child I loved to watch Walt Disney Sunday nights on TV.

I couldn't get enough of the shows. **What about you?**

When I look back on those programs it is funny that so many of the shows shared the same story line. Some child, or a couple of children break the rule that we all know we shouldn't. Sure enough they get lost, trapped or in some sort of serious danger. Everyone eventually goes in search of the lost or missing who are found and forgiven, and even celebrated. This I came to realize was not my experience.

When I tried getting away with some of those things I was always found but the rest of the story involved some sort of punishment. Somehow there was a dis-connect or at least a mixed message in those Walt Disney shows. Are you with me here? And yet they captivated us, week in and week out.

One of our earliest urges, one of our deepest needs in life is to be **sought, found and celebrated**, no matter what! This is central to our **gospel** lesson today. The story begins at the end of this **seeking, finding, celebrating** sequence. **Jesus** has **sought** and **found** the lost, the outcast, the sinners and is **celebrating** table fellowship. At this point the **Scribes** and **Pharisees** happen upon the party and are scandalized. Now remember, **Luke** usually makes the **Scribes** and **Pharisees** the fall guys because the **Pharisees** have excluded the followers of **Jesus** from the synagogue tradition.

For us today, the people who are upset would be those who see life primarily as external dos and don'ts. Who define goodness in terms of

personal piety, or proper performance. They focus on ‘what’s right’ as opposed to ‘what helps.’

Now today’s version of the people who are sitting up close with **Jesus** perhaps are those caught up in the recent mass migration from war torn nations or simply a wide variety of refugees and new Canadians from far-away lands. However you define the participants **Jesus** opens up the table of hospitality. **Jesus** invites those who have been excluded. The ones no one is looking for.

**Jesus** shows the true nature of religion which is *inclusion and compassion*. The Resisters show up and complain that the door is too wide open or the gate is too low.

So **Jesus** addresses two parables to these complainers that require them to revolutionize their cultural norms.

**“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 you find it, and then publicly celebrate your behavior?”**

No one! It just doesn’t make sense! They think “Why risk the 99 in the wild for the one? If it is that foolish to wander off, it deserves what happens.” When folk are concerned about Homeland Security or violent crime or old stock identity, this parable just doesn’t make sense.

**“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, (a days wage) does not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? She then calls together her friends and family and has a party to celebrate the finding of the lost coin.”**

No one would do that! It just doesn't make sense! They think "We wouldn't spend more money than the coin itself is worth on the party to celebrate the finding." When folk are concerned about keeping economic control or job security or a uniform work place, it just doesn't make sense.

However the stories do challenge them to rethink their value system. *Is it rules or relationships? Is it costs or compassion that count with God?* With **God**, when it comes to a living creature lost, we don't cut our losses; we are all in this together. Life is a unity, all or nothing, so we go and search until the life is found.

With **God** when it comes to something or someone that gets lost in the clutter or falls between the cracks, or caught in the inconsistencies of the system we don't forget about it or them, we seek until we restore situations back to balance, to right relationship and celebrate.

With God we don't turn a blind eye.

**God's New Day** answers the question in every human heart.

*"Am I that treasured one, worth risking for?"*

*"Am I that treasured one, worth searching for?"*

**God's New Day** answers these questions in every human heart with this experience.

*"Yes! I'm found and you rejoice! What love! What love!"*

### **The Application for Today**

The **Reign of God** is about **seeking, finding, and celebrating relationships, no matter what.**

Hymn # 360 vss. 1&2 *A Woman and a Coin, the Coin Is Lost*

Luke 15:11-33

All in the Family

Brian McLaren's excellent book entitled, *"Why Did, Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?" "Christian Identity in a Multi-faith World,"* offers a fresh interpretation of this famous parable. It was written as a result of and in response to 9/11. So in light of the fifteenth anniversary of the 9/11 Terror Attack today and even though it is not part of the lectionary reading for this week, I want to review some of Brian McLaren's insights and share some of my own.

According to McLaren this parable hinges on lost and found identities. He suggests in our postmodern pluralistic world, read post 9/11 world, the cast of characters in the first verse of the chapter could read this way:

*'Now all the Muslims and Buddhists, New Agers and agnostics were coming near to listen to him. And the radio preachers and heresy hunters were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes non-Christians and eats with them. So he told them a parable..."'*

The folks coming near to listen to **Jesus**, however we choose to depict them and the resisters at a distance, however we see them are all confused about their true identities, so **Jesus** tells this final parable to make things perfectly clear.

Now, traditionally interpreted this story climaxes when the runaway boy returns home feeling disgraced, hoping to re-enter the household as a slave. However the father graciously receives him, not as a slave but as a son. We call it the story of the Prodigal Son. Even the modern hymn written in 1990, that we have been singing stops here. Vicki and I had to

create another sung response to go with the partitioning of the reading this morning.

The real climax as we have slowly come to recognize of late occurs later when the father slips out of the welcome-home party to speak with the alienated older brother outside. As the interchange unfolds, it becomes clear that the older son feels every bit as confused about his identity as his brother:

*“Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.”*

Even though he has remained dutifully at home, he sees himself as a slave, not a son, taking orders, putting in his time.

As McLaren sees it, both brothers, not just one, suffer from an identity crisis. Neither sees himself as he truly is: **God’s beloved child and connected to his brother in one family.** The father’s prodigal love to the younger son becomes the means by which the older brother could discover how loved he himself is... if he would *“have eyes to see and ears to hear.”*

But he doesn’t! In his alienated and hostile identity, he can’t even speak of *“my brother.”* Instead he refers to the returned runaway as *“this son of yours.”* Then the father cleverly, wisely, tenderly turns the phrase, referring to him as *“this brother of yours.”*

The primary message of this story, then, is not addressed to rebellious younger sons sowing their wild oats, as traditionally supposed. The primary message is addressed to the hostile older brothers who feel right and superior and offended, who won’t join the party; who won’t join **God** in welcoming and celebrating *“the other as brother.”*

Now note how *‘other’* is included within the word *brother.*

So according to McLaren the moral of the story goes something like this:

You can't maintain hostility against *'the other/brother'* without also withdrawing from the father who loves both you and the *other/brother* as beloved children. If you maintain hostility against the *other/brother*, you stop acting like a son and start playing the part of a slave. When you cut off the *other/brother*, you're breaking **God's** heart. **God** wants you to join in loving the other/brother as part of one family.

This parable is sometimes entitled 'the lost son', to go with the other two that of a lost sheep and a lost coin, but which son is lost? When the story ends the younger son *'was lost but now is found'*. So the lost son is still outside in the dark looking in. He is the son who still doesn't know who he is, where he is, and what he is doing. He is the only outsider--placed there by his own refusal to love! And in this, he is the intended mirror for the intended audience:

Who are the grumbling resisters today?

### **Application for Today**

In the aftermath of 911, I hope and pray we all choose to be inside at the party of **God's** love, celebrating all as one family. After all we have had fifteen years to get it right.

Hymn #79 MV Spirit Open My Heart