

Rejoicing in Repentance

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Tyson Labuhn

Sixty-six—Scripture is made up of 66 books of the Bible, and at the center of it all is the cross. In His earthly ministry, our Lord Jesus, who was the fulfillment of what had been previously prophesied, always seemed to be looking to the time when He would die on the cross for the sins of the whole world. And yet, as part of His earthly ministry, He sought after the lost. Because “When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

Each lost sinner is precious in Jesus' sight. Even as Jesus made His way to Jerusalem, toward His crucifixion, He went to those who seemed to be lost. He taught all those who would listen. Because there was so much to teach them, that they might truly understand. He taught those who were social outcasts. He taught church leaders who wanted to find fault, cause trouble, and grumbled against Him. So, He taught in parables that those who were truly listening might hear and learn.

Once there was a little girl who came home from church and told her mother that the pastor had spoken about her in his sermon. Her mother was amazed at how her little daughter had been able to apply what the pastor said. But then, her daughter said that in fact the pastor had read her name from the Bible. And her mother wondered if she had been distracted during the sermon. So, she asked her daughter to tell her what the pastor said. And the little girl replied, "Jesus receives sinners and 'edith' with them." While the little girl's name was Edith, the moral of the story is that we should apply what hear from scripture to our own lives, because God is speaking to us, that we might continue to believe, that the gift of the cross is each one of us, personally.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus shares with us the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The shepherd is caring and persistent. He goes off, leaving the other sheep, to find the one that is lost until it's found. He doesn't discipline it or scold it for being lost. Rather joyfully, he returns with the once-lost sheep back to the fold. And in the second parable about the woman who lost a coin, which could have represented a day's wages, the woman looks all over in her dimly lit home. She lights a lamp, sweeps the floor, and continues to look for it until the coin is found.

In both parables, we see the love and compassion of God as well as His persistence. Each one continues to search until that which has been lost is found once again. In the case of the lost sheep, there's rejoicing as the sheep is carried back home. Friends and neighbors are invited to rejoice. And when the woman finds the coin, she rejoices too, just like there's rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents.

But if you recall, Jesus was also addressing the Pharisees and teachers, who considered themselves above sin. They didn't feel any need to change how they were living. They didn't acknowledge their sin. If there is no sin, then there's no reason to repent. While sin is in the world, even if they had sinned, their sin wasn't as bad as the guy who was living in it. After all, isn't that why "those people" are the social outcasts, like those who live below the poverty level, those who drink too much, and those who commit adultery, who need to repent so that they might change "their" live and be forgiven? And without forgiveness there isn't rejoicing.

Again, Jesus was persistent in seeking the lost even on His way to the cross. During His earthly ministry, He took time to find the one who needed finding. He even went out of His way to find the Samaritan woman at the well. This is how He showed compassion to lost sinners, ever seeking and ever patient, because of His great love for the lost. For according to 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is

patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Every once in a while, someone on a Sunday morning will ask me if we have a lost-and-found. They might've misplaced their sunglasses or keys. I usually ask them if they've looked at the Welcome desk or maybe in the secretary's office. We don't actually have a lost-and-found, because the whole church really is one big lost-and-found. Not necessarily for sunglasses or keys, but for people like you and I.

Each of us can wander off whenever we follow the ways of this world. Left to our own desires and choices, we would be lost forever. Many travel on that wide and broad path that leads to destruction, even “church people” who don't always feel the need to change their ways. God's word continues to speak to those who deny their need for repentance. Maybe they think that since they can receive absolution from a pastor at any time, so they don't need to change. But absolution means that there's repentance and forgiveness, and forgiveness means that there's sin. None of us wants to hear that we've sinned, that our thoughts, words, and deed come from a not-so-good place within us. Some people have even gone so far as rejecting the truth of Scripture, because recognizing our sin reminds us that we need help, and we need to repent.

Repentance brings Joy. We can rejoice that our loving Lord is patient with us while we still have time. Each of us are born as enemies of God. Our sinful natures don't desire to know or do God's will. Our lives are filled with different thoughts, words, and deeds. And we can wander away from God's flock like lost sheep distracted by our own selfish desires, especially when we tend to focus too much on our own needs rather than the needs of others. And when we focus too much on the things of this world rather than seeking God's kingdom first, that's when we become like wandering sheep going astray.

We need redemption. That's why conversion is at the heart of who we are because we all get lost out in the desert from time to

time, even when we're part of the fold. We all need someone out there, willing to come looking for us, our Lord Jesus Christ. Because the truth of the matter is that it seems we're in a struggle against our sinful natures trying to turn back, to find our way home again to our true selves. The ones made in God's image, how we were first made before sin came into the world.

It's a joyful struggle because repentance is joyous. God graciously allows us to turn back toward the truth and that wholeness once again in Him. And together, life can become a process of shouldering one another of walking each other home. Sometimes we can be the carrier, and sometimes we can be the one being carried. Yet all the time, we make our way so that were included once again in God's family. A sheep, a coin, it's about the character of God, who brings us joy.

Sixty-six. Scripture is made up of 66 books of the Bible; at the center of it all is the cross. Our Lord Jesus, who was the fulfillment of what had been previously prophesied, always seemed to be looking to the time when He would die on the cross for the sins of the whole world.

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him, the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). And our heavenly Father has revealed to us His great love through His Son, Jesus Christ. That when we repent and turn away from our sins. Not only does He forgive us, but the angels in heaven rejoice, because each of us is precious in His sight. And repentance brings heavenly joy. So, repent and rejoice in His forgiveness that you might be with Him, both now and always.

In Jesus Name, Amen.