

“REJOICE WITH ME,” Luke 15:1-10, Proper 19-C, SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

In the words of our Gospel lesson this morning, St. Luke is sharing with us two great observations concerning an event that took place in our Savior’s life one day!

First of all, Luke tells us that on that day, **all sorts of “tax collectors” and “sinners” had gathered around Jesus**, not only so that they could gladly listen to him preach to them the good news of the coming of God’s kingdom into our world through him! But so that they, also, could **share a meal; that is: “Break bread,” with our Lord!**

These **“tax collectors and sinners”** would gladly tell you that they were absolutely delighted and immensely grateful to be welcomed into Jesus’ real presence!

Why? Because he spoke **encouraging words to them! He filled them with hope;** so very many of them, who had **come before our Lord with heavy hearts, full of despair!** They loved listening to Jesus’ messages, such as we find in **LUKE 12:32, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom!”**

Well, Jesus was eating and drinking and enjoying the company of these people, for whom he had come into this world to save them (*and us*), from the completely devastating, eternal consequences of their sins, by bringing them forgiveness and the promise of heaven!

The second observation Luke shares with us is that the Pharisees and the scribes were observing all of this from a short distance away, and Luke tells us: “They grumbled, saying: ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’ (Luke 15:2)!

Yes, one definition of the verb to **“grumble”** is to complain and to bemoan the fact that something, you find unacceptable, is happening, but it is also always the kind of complaining people do **“under their breath;” the type of muted complaining that still takes place today!**

Of course, no matter how discrete they tried to be, Jesus knew everything they were saying, because this Jesus is the same God whom King David tells us about in **Psalm 139, “Who knows our every thought, long before we think it and knows our every word, before it rolls off our tongues and long before we speak it” (Psalm 139:1-4)!** Friends, I know that it is very easy for us to caricature the Pharisees and the scribes whenever we see them being mentioned in the pages of the New Testament; but perhaps, we **shouldn’t be so quick as to always stereotype them!**

I believe Jesus would have understood **that they believed that they had a legitimate bone of contention to pick with him!** Why? Because here he was **“hanging out”** with the kind of people that were normally thought of as the **“dregs,” the “lowlifes” and the “riffraff” of First Century Jewish Society.**

Jesus knew what they were thinking, and what they were grumbling about, and nevertheless addressed them very politely, respectfully and cordially. **Jesus understood why these men were confused! Because all throughout the Old Testament there is a solid message that is repeated, again and again, that goes something like this in Leviticus 19:2, “You must be holy as your father in heaven in holy!”**

And certainly Jesus' actions must have now brought, to the very forefront of their hearts and minds, those **magnificent words of the First Psalm** that serves as a powerful introduction to the whole Psalter, consisting of 150 different psalms: *"Blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor take his seat in the midst of scoffers! For his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on the law of the Lord does he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1-3)!*

And even St. Paul, in the New Testament, tries to impress this same kind of spiritual lesson upon us when he writes in **2 Corinthians 6:14-15**: *"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"*

BUT: LOST AND FOUND, WE'VE ALL HAD THIS EXPERIENCE IN OUR LIVES BEFORE, TOO, HAVEN'T WE? And not just one time, but no doubt more times than we would even care to remember. I am grateful for the fact that I still am carrying around the same Social Security Card in my wallet that was first assigned to me when I was in the 8th Grade back in 1968. Why? In part, because my mother told me to sign it and put it in my wallet, and to never lose it! So, I did!

But I remember losing other things, like my high school class ring from **Mainland High School**, from which I graduated in 1973, though I later lost it while playing basketball in college one day with my friends! But referencing what I said earlier, this doesn't mean that I have never lost my wallet, for I have, but by the grace of God I was also able to find it.

How about you ladies? Have you ever lost your engagement ring, or your wedding band? If so, were you ever able eventually to find it again!" Here Jesus is, in these two parables, trying to impress upon the Pharisees and the scribes the great value that **OUR Heavenly Father places upon every human being**. All are important to him. *"He is the God who is not willing that any should be lost, but that all should come to repentance and be saved" (2 Peter 3:9)!*

Friends, **A MAN who had 100 sheep**, though one of them went astray, could have said to himself: *"So what? What's the big deal anyway? I still have 99 other sheep to harvest wool from!"* But the "good" shepherd doesn't take this attitude at all. Instead, he goes out and he searches and searches, behind every hillside and down into the valley, looking for that lost sheep...and he will not discontinue his search, until he finds it. And when he finds it, he doesn't beat it with a stick, because he knows that sheep are prone to wander off like this! He knows that unlike a **sheepdog**, that could have found its way back home, that a poor sheep has **no internal compass! And how about that woman who had ten coins?**

The commentator **William Barclay** infers that ten coins, each of which was a **"drachma,"** were often sewn to a strip of material, as part of a woman's dowry, which her father had given to her so that she could become married. If a coin was missing on that piece of ribbon or that strip of cloth, it could completely wreck a young woman's plan to become married. Of course, this part of the story, **is only speculation at best!**

Whatever that coin symbolized to this woman, it was extremely valuable to her, and so she lights a lamp and sweeps every nook and cranny of her home until she finds it! **TWO OF THE MAJOR POINTS OF JESUS' PARABLES HERE ARE:**

1. Sinners are lost until God finds them. And,

2. God goes to great lengths to seek us out, so that he can bring us home!

But when St. Luke presents to us the news of this day's events, he is very much reminding us that two different people, or two different groups of people can look at the very same situation and interpret it in two entirely different ways.

I am sure that most of us have probably heard that old Indian fable, which truly is an "Indian" fable and not a "Native American" fable, about six blind men who all had an encounter, one day with an elephant, but each of them individually at different parts of the day accessing different parts of this magnificent animal!

The first blind man touched the broad side of this enormous animal and said, "I think an elephant is like a wall!"

The second, feeling the tusk of the elephant said, "The wonder of the elephant is that it is sharp and like a very pointed-spear!"

The third blind man approached the animal, and taking the elephant's squirming trunk within his hands, boldly spoke up and said, **"The elephant is like a giant snake!"**

The fourth reached out with an eager hand and wrapped his two hands around one of the elephant's knees and he said, "Tis clear enough to me, the elephant is like a tree!"

The fifth man, whose first encounter with the elephant, was to hold one its big flapping ears between his two hands said, "No, I think the elephant is like a fan, you know, the kind you wave back and front of your face on a hot day, but this one was bigger than most others I've encountered!"

The sixth blind man, seizing on the elephant's swinging tail, said: "The Elephant is like a piece of rope!"

Of course, each of these six different men were right with their first initial encounter with an elephant, but through their continued evaluation of this magnificent elephant, their whole perception and understanding of an elephant was drastically changed!

Please notice, my friends, in the Gospel lesson today, that there is a mighty contrast between the way that the Pharisees and the scribes were interpreting Jesus ministry to these "tax collectors and sinners," from the perception they had been working with all their lives.

In great contrast to what these Pharisees and the scribes were "grumbling" about, please note that in verse 5, we find the word: "rejoicing," in verse 6 – "rejoice," in verse 7, "joy," in verse 9 "rejoice," in verse 10 – the word "joy"!

Heaven is already filled with JOY but when a sinner receives God's gift of salvation, or "gets saved" as others Christians like to say this, it seems as if there is a party that is then thrown in heaven, like the father threw for his prodigal son, who came back home, after learning the hard way, what so many of us so often forget! No matter how old we become, "OUR FATHER," that is, "OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN," ALWAYS KNOWS BEST!

What Jesus was trying to bring about in his critical observers' hearts and minds that day was something that we sometimes call today, a **"PARADIGM SHIFT,"** changing the **whole way that a person views a situation to another way of viewing that same situation.**

One of the best stories I ever heard about this comes to us from **STEPHEN COVEY'S** best-selling book, **first published in 1989: "THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE."** **Here's how the story goes:** *"I remember a paradigm shift I experienced one Sunday morning on a subway in New York. People were sitting quietly – some reading newspapers, some lost in thought, some resting with their eyes closed. It was a calm, peaceful scene. Then suddenly, a man and his children entered the subway car. The children were so loud and rambunctious that instantly the whole climate changed.*

The man sat down next to me and closed his eyes, apparently oblivious to the situation.

The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people's papers. It was very disturbing. And yet, the man sitting next to me did nothing.

It was difficult not to feel irritated. I could not believe that he could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild like that and do nothing about it, taking no responsibility at all. It was easy to see that everyone else on the subway felt irritated, too. So finally, with what I felt like was unusual patience and restraint, I turned to him and said, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more?"

The man lifted his gaze as if to come to a consciousness of the situation for the first time and said softly, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I just don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know who to handle it either."

Steven Covey writes: "Can you imagine what I felt at that moment? My paradigm shifted. Suddenly I saw things differently, and because I saw differently, I thought differently, I felt differently, I behaved differently. My irritation vanished. I didn't have to worry about controlling my attitude or my behavior; my heart was filled with the man's pain. Feelings of sympathy and compassion flowed freely.

"Your wife just died? Oh, I'm so sorry! Can you tell me about it? What can I do to help?"

Everything changed in an instant!"

Friends, I don't know if the **attitude of the Pharisees and the scribes may have changed at all; because St. Luke doesn't tell us! Maybe their attitude changed only a very little bit,** but then again, Jesus' all-powerful Word could have changed their hearts and minds completely, so that they could now see what Jesus was doing from a totally different perspective.

But what I hear God saying to me, this morning, and perhaps to each of you too, is that rather than our constantly doing our best to find fault with other people, is that we should seek to love them the way that Jesus first of all, loved us, and still loves us!

While the Pharisees and the scribes were **"grumbling"** that day, as Jesus made his way to the cross, both the Old Testament and the New Testament assure us **he never complained at all!** Isaiah said it like this: **"As a lamb before its shearers are dumb, so he opened not his mouth!"**

Pilate was shocked that Jesus wouldn't do more to defend himself!

As you and I come to the Lord's Table again this morning, can't we each hear Jesus inviting us to receive his Holy Supper again today, but with this attitude: "REJOICE WITH ME!" AMEN