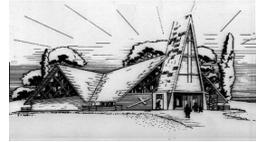




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon - Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19C)

Repentance according to God's Way!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 15, 1-10:

- **1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.
- **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
- **3** So he told them this parable:
- **4** "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"
- **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'
- **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
- **8** "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?"
- **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'
- **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts and create in us a right heart that longs for your mercy! Amen.*

Dear Congregation in Christ!

- The passage of last Sunday ended with the words of Jesus: "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*" And here they come! The sinners and tax-collectors were all drawing near to hear Jesus! They didn't come to see or experience some new spiritual fad. They came to hear Him!
- This was in stark contrast with the Pharisees and scribes who grumbled because Jesus was receiving sinners and ate with them. He associated with them. He defiled Himself with the rubble of society. He could not be the messiah who, according to their ideas and teachings, would set up a powerful millennial kingdom on earth for the righteous Jews! So they reasoned!
- Now, both of these groups heard the parables Jesus preaches about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son! A shepherd is someone who travels, who attends to the one lost sheep, hooked-up in the wilderness. He goes out and looks for the lost ONE!
- The Pharisees and scribes heard this as Law, because they were the shepherds of the

nation, but they didn't care about the tax-collectors and sinners of society. They would not have themselves be defiled by rescuing the lost ones! They were more concerned about the ninety-nine righteous who could pay their temple levies! It was all about the big numbers to feed on! What is the value of one lost sinner against ninety-nine righteous?! And here we have to remember what we saw in the previous sermons, namely that the Pharisees are a vivid picture of our old Adam!

- A Good Shepherd does not reason like this! The good Shepherd is concerned about each ONE of the lost ones, who are His!
- And the Good Shepherd does a wonderful thing with the lost sheep, with the wounded and frightened ONE who got so stuck in the wilderness: He picks up the sheep on His shoulders and carries it home! What a most beautiful and comforting picture! And does He grumble while carrying the heavy load of the sheep all the way out of the wilderness to the safety of His home? Not at all! He is rejoicing as He journeys back to the village!
- Let us pause for a moment: Without the Shepherd lifting the burden of the Lost One on His shoulders there is no restoration! He has to do it Himself. He has to carry the full weight of the sheep. But this task the Good Shepherd accepts with joy! The price of restoration of the Lost One is joyfully taken upon Himself by the Good Shepherd! And we know that this meant for Jesus to go to the cross! Jesus went to the cross with joy in His heart, because He fully knew that He was carrying all our burdens to take us home!
- There is a two-fold joy described in this parable! When the Shepherd finds the Lost One and carries it home and when He arrives at the village. There the community shares in the joy the Shepherd has for having found the Lost One!
- The joy over a sinner that repents! That is what Jesus' ministry is all about!
- In the next parable of the lost coin this is reinforced plus we hear that even the angels of God are included in the joy over ONE sinner who repents! Repentance is important. That is clear.
- However, hang on one moment, where do the sinners ever “repent” in these parables? Does the lost sheep call His Shepherd? No. With the lost coin it is self-explanatory that a lost coin cannot make itself to be found. If it is lost its lost! It has to be found by someone who is searching after it! That person searching for it, just like the shepherd, does all the work! The lost sheep and the lost coin, they can't move! Someone has to come and find them! So, where do the sinners repent?
- And isn't this exactly the accusation, the problem the Pharisees and scribes of all times have with Jesus' actions: With lost sheep and lost coins you can reason like this, but how can you dare to reason like this with filthy tax-collectors and sinners! If they repent and show that they mean it, then they may come back. But where have they decently repented?
- So, the critical thing is, what is Jesus' understanding of repentance? Because He says these sinners have repented! How is Jesus' understanding of repentance different to what the

Pharisees, that is our old Adam, reasoned? Let us remember that over the issue of the right understanding of repentance the Reformation broke out!

- First let us have a look what repentance meant and means to the Pharisees and scribes of all times.
- And for this we need to hear a little bit of the next parable, the main parable of the three, popularly called the “parable of the prodigal son”. We are not going to go into the whole of the parable. We want to focus on one aspect only. What about the repentance of the prodigal son?
- We follow the story: The youngest son asked his father for his inheritance while the father was still alive. The craziest thing happened: The father handed out his inheritance before he died to both the oldest and youngest sons. Then the next extraordinary thing happened. The father allowed his younger son to take his inheritance and leave him and his community risking that all could be squandered. Which happened. He squandered it all!
- On top of this a famine was coming over the land where the youngest son presided. This caused him to fall into great distress. Whilst the youngest was sitting with the pigs, even longing to eat what they got, it is recorded that ‘he came to himself’. He came to his senses. He realised in what a dreadful situation he found himself. And he made a plan to get out of it! He would go and honestly declare to his father that he was not worthy to be his son anymore. He had sinned against heaven and before the father. All he asked was to be a servant of the father. At least the servants of his father were better off than he who was working in the foreign land for a gentile owner.
- If this story would have ended here it might have been a good moral story even for all Pharisees ears. At least the prodigal son repented and he wanted to make the relationship right with his father *by working off his debt*. There was sorrow over sin and *willingness to work off his guilt!*
- But, the story doesn't end here. The greatest surprise was yet to come: Whilst the prodigal son was still far away the father saw him and had compassion on him. The father ran towards the son, gave him a huge hug and kissed him. That meant. You are still my son!
- The prodigal son began his own fabricated confession, probably expecting a long moral speech saying: “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*” Yet, important: He omits the last sentence of his planned confession, namely: “*Treat me as one of your hired servants.*”!! He dropped that last part because he was overwhelmed by the fathers mercy and grace! The father had already restored him to be his son, how could he go against his father, again, and say, no, I am not your son!
- So, the fathers overwhelming compassion and mercy turned his corrupt confession into the right one, namely, 'I am not worthy to be your son', without the part where he would still do satisfaction, where he would vow to work off his guilt, without his pride intact! It was all

about, 'I am not worthy- there is nothing I can do! This is the true confession!

• The father spoke to his servants and made sure that all realise, his son has been found by ordering an immediate feast and dressing him as a restored son! The father responded with even greater gifts and joy, a feast!

• Then came the eldest son of the father. He did not rejoice with the father over the lost son who had been found. He grumbled about this act of mercy by the father. What particularly angered him was the feast!

• He was the one who had *served* his father all the time! But he never got a reward, so he grumbled! Now this unworthy prodigal son, who had squandered all the fathers gifts on the whores, he got the feast with the fattened calf!

• In the end it is the *mercy of the father* that the eldest son rejects! And he rejected the true repentance of his brother! It is not good enough just to say, I am not worthy! There needs to be some works at the least to proof the genuineness of the repentance or something along that line coming from his own side! It has to be his own decision, a modern version would be.

• The father lovingly corrects the eldest son: *'Child, you are always with me, and all things that are mine are your things. But it was also necessary to make merry and to rejoice, because this your brother was dead and he has come to life, and he was lost and has been found.'* " He always had the father and all his gifts! He too is son, like his brother, only because of the love of the father, not because of the eldest sons service to the father!

• So, where is repentance, or what is true repentance according to Jesus' teaching?

• Answer: True repentance starts with God setting the circumstances, in other words facilitating our repentance, so that we will get into tribulations which will drive us back to our Father in heaven. He drives us back to Himself by allowing us to experience the Law in our lives, if necessary to such an extend that we cannot move. But, He doesn't let us rot in our distress. He takes us back home and whilst we are still far off our heavenly Father meets us with His overwhelming compassion and mercy, a compassion filled with real joy and power. He leads us to the right confession: *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called Your son.*" In hindsight, as we hear the truth of God's Word, we cannot but confess that it was the good Shepherd who found us and took us back home. He restored the son-ship by Grace alone, and where this happens to us and to another one of our neighbours, we fall in with the joy in heaven and on earth ! **Amen.**

• *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. **Amen.** (^{ESV} Eph 3,20-21).*