**Please turn with me to Luke 15**

In Luke’s Gospel (Good News)

We find 3 parables that reveal “God’s Searching Love”.

**The context for these parables is found in Luke 14.**

Jesus was being carefully watched by the religious leaders…

He was showing love, but breaking all of their religious rules in the process by putting the needs of people ahead of religion.

* He healed on the Sabbath.
* He taught that one should humble themselves and help the needy… otherwise at the judgement, the proud will be humbled.
* He taught the “risks and rewards” of being a true follower of Jesus. That they should **“count the cost”** before choosing to give themselves to building the kingdom of God, lest they give up somewhere along the way and look foolish to the world God saved & sent them to reach.
* He ends in V35 with; “whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

**If you have ears, say AMEN!**

Having ears was not a rarity in Jesus day… So what is He saying?

1. **God’s searching love – Goes beyond the boundaries of religion.**

He was encouraging the people to pay close attention to what He was saying.

Luke 15:1-2 sheds some light on **who it was** that was using their **ears to listen** and who were **using their ears as a hat rack.**

* It was the sinners and tax collectors who gathered to **hear** Jesus.
* While the Pharisees focused on their own agenda (getting rid of Jesus because He was breaking their religious rules) but much to their chagrin, people were turning to Jesus anyway.

People who were so bad that they thought there was no hope for them…

**While the religious leaders saw themselves as;**

* Having it all together.
* Keeping all of the rules.
* They faithfully went to the synagogue.
* They were teachers of God’s Word.
* Faithful in their tithing as God instructs, etc…
* IN THEIR EYES, JESUS WAS SIMPLY UNNECESSARY TO THEM.

It was those religious people that Luke records, were standing around “muttering” (murmuring & complaining), about Jesus “welcoming sinners and eating with them.”

And as we learned last Wednesday evening in our Genesis study, it is this “murmuring & complaining” that often tells a story about a person.

It is a sign that one see’s themselves as better than others, or prefers complaining about others over focusing on their own shortcomings.

**Maybe** if the religious leaders had known God half as well as they thought they did, and used their ears to listen, when Jesus was speaking back in Luke 5:31-32, Luke 15 may have recorded this instead of them muttering…

**“Of course Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them!”**

**He told us before that;** “It’s not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

(Which one are you today?)

**So if Jesus is going to;**

* Call sinners, He should be expected to
* Greet sinners
* Reach out to save sinners **and**
* Spend time discipling sinners, so His saving and discipling work can continue.

It was obvious that the Pharisees didn’t like Jesus, so they didn’t need to spend a lot of time listening to His purpose.

They weren’t only looking down upon Jesus, it was anyone who wasn’t a part of their religious “club”.

If you were here when we studied the book of Acts, you’ll remember this well.

The religious leaders had twisted the Law that God had given to Moses (intended to make his people different from the rest of the world), to mean they should avoid any contact with people who **ate things like pulled pork sandwiches.**

That doesn’t sound like love, it sounds like exclusivism.

That’s why God gave Peter the vision in Acts 10, removing all food restrictions for the Jewish people. To take away their excuse not to go to the people that weren’t like them.

Perhaps some of you have come out of that kind of church background…

**Where church was for the saint, not the sinner.**

Where the focus was on pleasing the saints, not allowing anyone to serve or do anything in the ministries of the church unless they first;

* Repented of sin.
* Obeyed God’s Word.
* Followed the rules of the church.
* Attended church every time the doors were open.
* Tithed faithfully, etc…
* Professed to being saved and sanctified.
* HOLDING OTHERS TO A HIGHER STANDARD THAN THEY THEMSELVES WERE LIVING.

Now, don’t get me wrong, those things are **very good and we should be growing in heart holiness which produces those things (without the prideful/“self-rightous” attitude towards others).**

The **SHOCKING** purpose of the Mosaic Law was (inclusivism).

God saves people to live a “holy life” as God Himself is holy, to **draw people to Him, not push them away.**

As we see in the example that Christ has given us, God’s searching love does not allow “religious boundaries” to interfere with the ministry of reaching others.

1. **God’s searching love – may seem reckless.**

**Luke 15:3-7** Jesus asks “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them…?”

Because God is **proactive** and not a **reactive procrastinator**, His love immediately causes Him to **search** for the one that is lost…

The 99 **reactive procrastinating** sheep might think, “what’s the big deal, you still have us 99?” Which is love for self, and self-preservation, rather than the “searching love of God”.

**Not only is the missing one a BIG DEAL to God, but a BIG DEAL to the ONE WHO IS LOST!!**

So how do the lost become unimportant to the 99 who are found?

* They forget what it was like to be lost.
* They forget how good it was to finally be found.
* They rest in their “found-ness” and stop searching themselves.
* They allow the religious activity and/or the things of this world to disconnect them from the purpose for which God saved them for.

The example that has been communicated for the follower of Jesus in Luke 15 and lived out through the life of Jesus is reckless because Jesus went to;

* Those who drank & used bad language.
* Smelly people (sheep have been known to smell).
* Those who are enslaved to riches/possessions. **Luke 15:8-10**
* Those who are making bad relationship choices (both sons). **Luke 15:11-32**

That just about covers the kind of sheep I was when “God’s searching love” found me…

My mother-in-law (Dee’s step-mom Dorothy) sent me an illustration that I told her I would share with you today… Cause if I don’t… Oh boy…

A little boy was taught in Sunday School about the importance of telling other people about Jesus and inviting them to church to hear the “Good News” of God’s searching love, to repent of their sin that separates them from God and be saved.

It was a cold and rainy day, when the boy got dressed, put on his rain coat and told his father:

"Ok dad I'm ready"

His Dad, said: "Ready for what?"

"Dad, it's time to go outside and distribute our church flyers."

Dad replied: "Son, it's very cold and it's drizzling outside."

The child looked surprised at his father and said: "But dad, people need to know about God even on rainy days."

Dad replied, "Son, I'm not going outside in this weather."

With despair, the child said: "Dad, can I go alone? Please!"

His father waited for a moment and then said: "Son, you can go. Here's the flyers, be careful."

"Thank you dad!"

The 11-Year-old walked the streets of the village for two hours, handing out the flyers to the people he saw.

With his last flyer in his hand, he turned to the first house he saw, walked to the front door, rang the bell several times and waited, but no one came out.

Finally the boy turned to leave, but something stopped him. The child turned back to the door and began ringing the bell and pounding on the door. He kept waiting. Finally the door was opened gently.

A lady came out with a very sad look and asked:

"What can I do for you, son?

With radiant eyes and a bright smile the child said:

"Lady, I'm sorry if I upset you, but I just want to tell you that God really loves you and that I came to give you my last flyer that talks about God and His searching love.

The boy gave her the flyer and she said, "Thank you, son, God bless you!"

The next Sunday morning, the pastor was in the pulpit and when the service began he asked:

"Does anyone have a testimony or something they want to share?"

Gently, in the back row of the church, an older lady stood up.

When she started talking, a radiant and glorious look came over her:

"Nobody in this church knows me. I have never been here before. Last Sunday I wasn’t even a Christian.

My husband died a while ago leaving me totally alone in this world.

Last Sunday was a particularly cold and rainy day, and I came to the end of my road, since I had no hope and I didn't want to live anymore.

I had taken a chair and a rope and went up to the attic of my house to end my suffering.

As I stood on the chair, alone and broken hearted, I heard someone pounding on my front door.

I waited and waited, but the knocking was getting louder and louder, and I couldn't ignore it anymore.

I wondered, who could it be? So I got down to see…

When I opened the door, I couldn't believe my eyes…, in front of my door was the most angelic looking, wet child I've ever seen.

He said with the voice of an angel: "Lady, I just want to tell you that God’s searching for you and He really loves you." Then he handed me a flyer from your church.

"When the little angel disappeared between the cold and the rain, I closed my door and read every word on the flyer.

Then I went to the attic to get rid of the chair and rope.

I didn't need them anymore. As you see God’s love found me. **Now I am a happy daughter of the King!**

I had to come personally to say “thank you” to that little angel that God sent just in time, to rescue me from an eternity away from God, in a horrible place called hell.

**As we near the end of our service today…**

**God’s love is searching for you today… Has He found you?**

If not, Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart right now (Rev 3:20)

**Will you let Him in?**