**Joy? In Repentance?**

**Luke 15:1-10**

Trinity III – 6.20.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus tells two parables in our text for today. He tells them because the church leaders, and the Pharisees grumbled because Jesus ate with those people whom they considered sinners. Jesus ate with those people who were considered the dregs of society, the vile sinners; prostitutes, tax collectors, and those who to all outward appearances were those who were the worst sinners.

Some people today like to misinterpret what Jesus was doing. NO, this is not Jesus’ social justice program whereby we are to associate with those who are of another race, another social strata, or downtrodden because of sexism or some other perceived difference. Jesus is not declaring that we are to break down the barriers and be accepting of all people. This is of course true.

It is true because all are created in the image of God. There is only one race! While difference in skin color do exist, even looking at yourself, and the summer sun had begun to do it’s work – either many are chameleons, their changing race, or there is micro-adaptations built into humanity. There are as many cultural differences between those have a German lineage as those who boast of an Irish heritage, and that is not even adding in the cultural dietary difference of those with a Filipino or Taiwanese background.

From the tower of Babel, language and cultural differences arose. But, Christ died for all. Therefore, we should not raise barriers to separated us from those who should be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What Jesus is doing – in all His work, and especially addresses in our text – has nothing to do with any of the supposed issues raised by those who want to divide by supposed differences of race, gender, social status, or any other such thing. What kind of people is He meeting and eating with? Sinners!

Jesus is not breaking down social barriers, He is receiving and eating with sinners.

Let me repeat that, Jesus is receiving and eating with sinners.

All those whom He is welcoming are sinners.

What is He doing with them? Calling them to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Why?

For the joy it brings!

 What brings you joy in your life?

This week, I had the “joy” of celebrating our 36th wedding anniversary, with the joy of a great meal with some who joined in our celebration. A couple weeks ago I had the sheer joy of a beautiful trout stream, fish rising, one buddy catching some.

In our text, at the end of the first parable Jesus tells us, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

At the end of the second parable He says, “I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Did Jesus declare that there is joy in repentance? Yes! Yes He did!

I know, you are thinking, “What kind of joy is there in repentance? To be repentant, I need to believe that I have failed, that I am a sinner, that I have done something wrong? That isn’t exactly joyful?

You know, you might be onto something. Let’s face it, who likes to admit their short-comings? And, if we are talking about true repentance, that is not exactly something enjoyable. You may even remember the description of true repentance I gave on Pentecost only five weeks ago.

Let me refresh your memory:

Repentance is not easy, especially if it is honest repentance. Honest repentance is soul-searching and embarrassing. Repentance goes deep and allows God’s Law to convict us of all sins, whether those sins be in our thoughts, words, or actions. Repentance makes no excuses. Repentance does not blame others, the world, or even Satan for leading us into sin. Repentance examines self and says quite simply, “mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa – by my fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault.”

I know, you thinking, there is joy in this? Seriously? Pastor, that type of soul-searching is heart-rending. It is painful!

I will not argue that point at all.

I will also tell you that our text for today is not the first time Jesus is mentioning repentance. In fact, only two chapters before this, He repeats twice in the span of two verses these words, “I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3 & 5)

By perish, He is not talking about the cessation of breathing in this mortal life – this is not “kicking-the-bucket.” To perish is to join Satan in his kingdom for all eternity. To perish is to be separated from the Author of Life for eternity. Yes, to perish is to go to hell.

I am guessing a few people are not finding a lot of joy right now in this sermon. I beg of you not to give up on it though. Keep paying attention. When you leave today, it is my intention that there will be joy in heaven over you, and in you.

Or maybe you are thinking that you are one of those ninety-nine righteous who have no need for repentance? I know many consider that the ninety-nine righteous who have no need of repentance are just fine. After all, they do not need to repent, Jesus says so right there in our text!

Really? Are you sure that is what Jesus is saying in this parable? Do you remember what happened that drove Jesus to speak these two parables? It begins by continuing what was going on before this chapter. Jesus was teaching, preaching, doing His thing, and large crowds were following and coming after Him. Luke’s fifteenth chapter begins, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1-2)

Are you beginning to see it? People who thought they were important in the church of that day were grumbling about what Jesus was doing. Jesus was hanging out with SINNERS!

Frank Finkelstein, head elder at “I’m-Better’n’U-Lutheran Church complains to the head trustee, “Pastor went fishing Herman Herpolsheimer – doesn’t he know what kind of guy he is, he is a swindler and potty mouth of the foulest kind?”

Lucinda Lutefiskiwitz, president of the Ladies Aid at the same congregation is gossiping with the chair of the altar guild, “Pastor was talking with Sheila Schnickelfritz at the coffee shop – she’s a loose woman, what was he doing with her?

Pharisees and Scribes! The righteous who have no need for repentance. Really?

Pharisees and Scribes – those who believe in their deluded hearts and minds that they have no need for repentance. They are just fine? Do you truly believe that God will bring them into his kingdom because of how good they are, that of their own, they are righteous?

You and I both know better than that.

Repentance sees our own sinfulness and desires it to end. Repentance desires us to purify our thoughts, cleanse our mouths, and straighten up our actions. True repentance trusts not in self, but in God’s Christ.

Yes, those sinners gathered around Jesus – flocked to Him – not because He had a new social program. It was actually Jesus who came to them! He sought them out! He found them. He gathered them to Himself, as He said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10) As He spoke to them the Holy Spirit changed them, His Word brought to them the Spirit who changes hearts and minds and moves people to repentance in Christ Jesus.

In repentance, there is no fear, for the True Love of God in Christ Jesus drives out fear. He speaks to them a Word of forgiveness. He grants to them peace. He gives joy that is eternal.

Lost sheep do not come home – they become dinner for lion, tigers, and bears – unless someone goes to seek them and finds them – and brings them home.

Lost coins remain lost – unless someone goes to the trouble to seek and to find them. As I quoted Jesus a moment ago, only a few chapters later in Luke, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

It is the righteous who feel no need for repentance, for whom heaven has no joy. They do not trust the work of God in Christ Jesus. They crucify Him who gives His life for their sinfulness, but they deny Him – they reject Him – they see no need to trust completely what He has done – they are the righteous. It is others who are sinners. And so, claiming to be people of faith, yet without repentance, they are lost. There is no joy in heaven over those who are lost.

That is why there is joy in repentance. God’s Word, bestows the Spirit upon those who do not refuse Him, who are moved to repentance. Repentance sees self as helpless, needing someone to come and lift them up. Christ lifts up sinners on His Cross and bestows upon them His life.

There is true joy in repentance, for repentance trusts the work of God – not self. True joy knows eternal life is granted.

Repentance is a mighty act of God which brings joy at another soul sought and found.

You dear friends were the lost sheep. You were the lost coin. The angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents – they rejoice over your repentance. Christ gave all His wealth to seek you, to find you, to save you – He gave His life unto death to redeem you.

With great joy, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

It is with great joy that we come with repentant hearts to the Table Christ sets before us. Here we are at table with the Master who feeds us. He gives us to eat and drink of the most costly fare – His body and His blood, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins.

In repentance we trust not in ourselves, but in Christ who cares for us. And today, the angels in heaven rejoice over the one sinner who repentantly comes to the table. And at this table, you are granted a joy that cannot be taken from you. God’s grace comes to you, seeks you, saves you, feeds and nourishes you.

Christ only receives those who acknowledge their sinfulness and trust solely in the forgiveness He speaks into them – and who abide at His table to receive the meal of His grace. And there is joy – both in heaven, and in your heart, over the eternal fruit of repentance.

Live in the peace and joy of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.