

Reflection for September 14, 2025 – Our Mission Inspired by Luke 15:1-10

It's getting close to curling season again. Just a few more weeks. I can't wait!

I curl in Summerland, and our club is doing some promotions to try and increase our membership. Yesterday, at the Summerland Fall Fair we had a booth set up and some curling displays. I helped out with the first shift from 9-11. We didn't have a lot of inquiries but some, mostly younger folks, visited, which is fantastic.

While standing by the booth with my coffee and fresh apple fritter, I gazed over to the drum circle which was quite close to our booth. A drum group was working the crowd with their rhythms, sometimes staccato and at other times smooth and perfectly coordinated. They invited passers-by to join them, and the air was filled with a beat, that had many of us dancing on the spot. (If you can call jogging in place and swaying in place dancing).

I wondered as I was watching, where the sinners were. Because there are sinners in every crowd. In every gathering, in every community, in every town, perhaps even in every church congregation there are sinners. Now these are not folks that fit my Reader's Digest definition of sinner; **"One who has committed a transgression, especially when deliberate of a law having divine authority. One who has transgressed against religious laws or moral principles."** No, I don't mean that kind of sinner. I'm referring to the kind of sinner that Luke refers to in his gospel account. Sinners in Jesus time were a rather broad category of whom we might say were undesirables.

That category has shifted over time. Still called sinners in some circles, today they would encompass street people, the unhoused, gay and lesbian individuals, those considered to be of inferior race, illegal immigrants (and many legal immigrants too), prostitutes (both men and women), many of the poor and desperate, addicts, refugees, foreigners and others. It is alarming that in these times of such enlightenment, if indeed we can call it that, so much ignorance abounds. Its alarming and incredibly disappointing.

And yet, it seems as if there is less tolerance for recognizing and celebrating our differences, and more propensity for criticism, ridicule, exclusion and even persecution of "the other." It comes from folks that don't agree with our politics. Individuals who don't like the way we talk about God, or the way we speak about the meaning of scripture. Someone who has bias towards our family of origin or our marital status. Someone really stuck on their right to entitlement.

In Jesus' mind and in God's kin-dom there are none that are to be cast aside. All are to be welcomed as universal children. There are no exceptions. We express this in our very own Mission Statement: ***"Our mission is a call to inclusive, loving and compassionate discipleship."***

Jesus acted out his mission through teaching. Healing came about through his pastoral presence. Those that listened to him, those labelled sinners of the time, found in him a passion for the human condition they had never experienced before. He welcomed them into his circle. He sat with them, ate with them, prayed with them. The marginalized, the lower-class citizens, women. He ate with them all, not just those like the Pharisees with high social standing. And we know he spoke with and healed the blind, lepers, the prostitute and others. All considered sinners.

Jesus gave them renewed purpose and a sense of belonging. He made his newly gathered community feel accepted, honoured and above all, loved. That had never happened before.

It is no surprise whatsoever then, that those that came to know Jesus came also into his fold, changed their outlook, were converted to Jesus' new way. In biblical terms they "repented," striking a new path, joining a new kin-dom of believers. Repent not as an expression of remorse for past behavior or to seek forgiveness but repenting through transformation.

The two parables we heard from Luke this morning celebrate the life-giving grace offered to someone who is lost and then found. Someone, on the outside looking in. Someone perhaps down on their luck, someone ostracized or shunned. Someone who needs to be loved. Someone at the Summerland Fall Fair, someone in this community or perhaps someone in this COF.

No sheep herder in his right mind would leave his flock of 99 sheep to find one who has been lost. It would be safer, more prudent, to look after the remaining 99 than risk catastrophe leaving them behind and wondering off by himself. One in one hundred is a small loss to bear. Better to leave well enough alone.

But in this parable the lost sheep represents one of the lonely, lost and disheartened, a sinner (an outsider) who needs to be brought into a community of love and support. A soul worthy of saving.

A woman is distraught because she has lost a valuable coin, a coin with which she could probably purchase a sheep. She searches high and low for the coin and when she finds it, she throws a party inviting her friends and neighbours. Clearly the monetary value of the lost coin is not the important part of the parable.

Perhaps we are meant to see this as the re-acquainting of an estranged son or daughter who has now returned, someone who was lost and now is found. Someone who has come back into the fold. Perhaps the woman needed to find herself again, and did so, bringing herself back from an abyss of despondency, from the perils of self-destructive behavior. ***“Just so, I tell you,” she says, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”***

Thinking back to yesterday and Summerland, what I wonder could be a productive way to inform the crowd of this incredible parable. What great news I could share.

There was a stage nearby and I suppose I could have gone over and pinched the mic and started. “Hi everyone, my name is Ian, and I have a story for you. There was a woman who had 10 coins. She lost one and.....” I imagine clearing out the crowd fairly quickly or answering to the local RCMP for my actions. Certainly, my buds at the curling booth would have scattered immediately.

Perhaps back here in Peachland I could plug in my headset and stand outside the sanctuary door when the bargain bin is open. They have lots of customers during the week. “Hi friends, I’m Ian, the minister here. I would like to tell you a story. There was a herdsman who had 100 sheep and unfortunately, he lost one. So, he left 99 of them and struck out to find the lost one.....” I know what would happen. The Bargain Bin sales would plummet, and the board would ask me to retire earlier than I have planned.

God how do I, how do we minister to those on the margins of society, those that feel like outcasts, those that have been made to feel inferior, those that have been told they are not welcome, those that are told they should go back to their own country? How do we support same sex couples and transgender folks? What is the best way to support the street person who wanders around our building or the alcoholic who we find passed out in the parking lot? How do we care for all who have been called sinners?

We live our Mission Statement. ***“Our mission is a call to inclusive, loving and compassionate discipleship.”***

We love our neighbour as our self. We stop short of passing judgement. We practice good listening. We honour our differences. We focus on being patient, kind and pastoral. We follow Jesus, eating with the tax collectors, seeking out the lost sheep, sharing our resources and loving one another fearlessly. I suppose we could sum up by saying we practice what we preach. Thanks for listening this morning, Amen