

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

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the gospel according to Saint Luke the fifteenth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which 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 neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have

found my sheep which was lost!' ⁷ "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ "And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' ¹⁰ "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Having read the Bible, I have to admit that I have been lost many times. Not necessarily in regards to doctrine or meaning, but predominantly when it comes to the geography and land of Israel. However, now that I have been to Israel and seen the lay of the land and experienced it, now when I read certain stories I can put a picture to a place. When I read about the wilderness near Jericho, I have a very vivid picture in my mind. When I read about the hills that the shepherds were tending their sheep in I have a clear picture in mind.

And I wonder if maybe Moses felt the same way. Moses was God's chosen shepherd for the people of Israel. He led them out of Egypt and he was leading them to the Promised Land... but he hadn't seen it. And as we find out, because of his sin he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land either. But just before he died, when he got to climb that mountain and see the land that

God was giving to the Israelites, I wonder if he got it then. Then he saw what God had prepared in advance and was slowly bringing the Israelites towards.

And so it is with us, we wander through this life just as lost as the sheep in our story or as lost as the coin. We don't know where we are, we don't know where we're going, we don't know how to get there... we are lost. However, just like in the text before us today, God does not leave us lost and in fact God finds us! And when God finds us, well, then we know that among the angels there is *much rejoicing in Heaven*.

Yes, Jesus tells us that when the sheep is found or when the coin is found there is much rejoicing in heaven over that. But in order to appreciate the end of the parable, I think we need a good grasp on the beginning of the text.

At the beginning of this account we hear about people who were coming to Jesus. These were the tax collectors, they were the sinners, these were the people that the Pharisees and other religious people could not stand to be around. These people were coming to Jesus and Jesus would dare sit and eat with them. YUCK! Obviously Jesus had no clue who these people were and obviously He was not that bright of a guy if He would hang around with such people.

However, these people came to Jesus for one reason and one reason only, to hear Him preach. These sinners, these tax collectors, these people who were socially excluded came to Jesus to hear Him preach... and preach He did. He knew the thoughts of the Pharisees and He wanted to help them understand the gravity of the situation, for they were not completely up to speed when it came to Jesus.

Instead of coming to Jesus to hear Him preach the 'good news' about the kingdom of God, the Pharisees came to the same dinner to see what Jesus would do and who He would talk to and interact with. Instead of coming to these sinners with the clear word of God, His law and His gospel, the Pharisees came to see what was for dinner and to mock and berate those who were attending. Instead of trying to help those lost sheep, those lost coins... they ignored them and abandoned them. And sadly this is all too often a condition of the world we live in today.

Instead of wanting to help others know God and bring the 'good news' to them, it is much easier to say "Well we have a church, they can come to us." Instead of wanting to make sure others are cared for and no longer wandering, it is much easier to think "Well, I'm a Christian, so maybe they should just learn from me how to act and be." Instead of

meeting people at their lowest point and helping them up, it is much easier to tear them down even further and boost ourselves up. Instead of being like the shepherd or the woman, too often we are just like the Pharisees.

And for that reason, Jesus has a parable for you. Which one of you, if you had 100 sheep would not leave the 99 to go in search of the one? Or maybe look at it this way, which one of you, having 5 children, would not allow the four who know Christ and love church to 'coast' while you spent more time focusing on the one who does not care as much or maybe has given up? And then, how happy are you when that child does recognize his faults, comes back to his Savior, and once again claims his spot in heaven? As joyful as you might be, the angels in heaven are more joyful than that. And now ask yourself... why are there still unchurched people around you? Why are we avoiding the one that God

has placed before us? Why are we not out searching for all those lost sheep?

When one sinner repents and realizes the error of his ways, the angels in heaven rejoice. They rejoice because that sinner finally gets it, that sinner finally understands and appreciates all that Jesus Christ has done for him. That sinner now sees Jesus Christ as his Savior, as his Redeemer.

And that is exactly who Jesus Christ is. Jesus Christ is the shepherd in this parable. He is the one who came into this world to seek the lost sheep, and we are those sheep. Jesus came here to go out in search of each and every one of us. He came in order to suffer, and be exhausted, and be mocked, and be persecuted... but He would not stop looking for His sheep. And then our shepherd died. He died for all that times that we do wander. He died to pay for all of our sins. He died so that He could finally take us home.

For three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He rose to proclaim that His life and death were perfect payment for all of our sins. Jesus Christ rose to assure us that the heavenly Father has accepted His sacrifice and now our debts are cleared. Jesus rose, so that He could take each and every one of His found sheep home to be with Him in His heaven.

And now through faith in our Savior that is what we have to look forward to. Yes, we wander on this side of heaven, but through faith, when our Shepherd calls out we will hear His voice... He will find us, and He will take us home. And when we come into His home, into His heaven, He will call all together so they can see the new lamb that He has redeemed, that He has found... and there will be much rejoicing. When we enter into that heavenly realm, there will be much

rejoicing; not for us, but for our Savior who has found us and has brought us home.

And now what about that lady and those coins. As church fathers have said, we can see the lady as the church, the bride of Christ. She may lose a coin every now and then, but when she does, she turns on that bright light of the gospel to search and search and search until that coin is found.

And that is exactly what we do. When a coin is lost, when one of our brothers or sisters is lost for a while, we turn on that bright light of the gospel, in both word and sacrament, to find them and bring them back. At times, God will use His 'broom of trials,' but He does this out of love to bring us to the surface so that the gospel-light can allow us to be found. And when we are found, when we are brought back into the church on this side of heaven, there is much rejoicing to be had.

For as Christ tells us there is much joy in heaven over the one sinner who repents or over the one coin that is found, for these were lost but now they have been recovered... re-covered in the blood of Christ and assured of their salvation.

Dear friends in Christ, it can be very easy to become a Pharisee. We can look at the people around us and wrinkle our noses and turn our heads and just have horribly wrong thoughts about these people... however, we need to be more like the sinners and the tax collectors in this account, not in the sinning part, but we need to come to Jesus to hear Him preach, to hear His words. For it is the word of God which draws us to Christ, just as it drew those sinners. And when we hear that word, that terrifying law preached against our sins... but then that comforting and forgiving gospel which preaches us into heaven; that is what we need to come to

Jesus for and that is what we need to hear from our Savior.

Dear friends, thanks be to God that though I often wander, He sent Jesus to come and find me. Thanks be to God that though I have often been lost, the light of the gospel has shone brightly and allowed me to be found by His bride, the church. And thanks be to God that though I have often been a Pharisee... He allows a sinner like me to come and hear His word, and because of that word there is *much rejoicing in Heaven*.

Thanks be to God. Amen.