

# September 11, 2016

## PRAYER

The words of my mouth are the mediations of our hearts be always acceptable unto thee.

Oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

## SERMON

Sin, repentance, forgiveness. We see those three elements throughout the whole of the scriptures. It is the theme that we see played out over and over again. Through the Old Testament and through the New Testament. It is what we are about. It is about God not accepting losing us to sin. That which takes us away from God rather than leading us closer to God.

Jesus is in a place where he has come to share with the people what God is doing. The Kingdom of God has come to you and it is for all people to hear. Both the righteous and the unrighteous. If there is such a thing as the righteous. He has come and he has teaching and preaching and the people that are profoundly affected by his words are those who feel that they are the furthest from God. Now they are hearing a voice that is calling to them as if God himself has come to seek them out. To tell them that sin is not the last word. That for those who repent and for those who turn away from those things that are leading them away from God, that God will forgive them and draw them close to himself. That's good news. That's gospel.

But for those who feel as though they have been living according to the law, for those who believe that they are the righteous in the land and in the people. They see this and they see Jesus speaking with those sinners. Accommodating them and not only inviting them but going to be with them specifically to have meals. And they question that Jesus could be a righteous man himself. For would a truly righteous man, a man sent from God, actually waste his time on these sinners. These people who are living contrary to what they believe is the right way to live in relationship with God.

How can that be? So by his very embracing of these people who have gone so far astray. The righteous are questioning whether he could be truly a man of God. So as Jesus often does, he tries to educate them. This is the teaching moments. To try to get them to understand God's true position when it comes to sinners and to the righteous and he does this in parables.

I have to tell you, I'm relieved that we've gotten back to the gentle parables of Jesus rather than some of the harsher words and teachings that we have had over the last few weeks. You can believe me when I say, those are tough to preach on because they were tough to hear. They bear truth and they emphasize how important it was for Jesus to let the people know what God really wanted from them and that was all that they are. But today we go back to the parables.

Now the parables, as I have preached and taught before, the parables are stories that are familiar to the people. The settings, what is taking place are very familiar to the people so that they are drawn in and so that they can identify with the story. Identifying allows them to come to that place sometimes with a dramatic twist but sometimes like the stories today, an understanding of celebrating what is true. So he

tells the story of losing the one sheep out of the hundred. He tells the story of the woman who loses the one silver coin out of the ten and they searched diligently until it is found. Then everybody celebrates.

It's easy to see this as an allegory. The simplest way to see, hear, and understand these two parables is as an allegory. Well the man is God or the woman is God. The sheep or the coin is these sinners who have gone astray. Who have separated themselves from God and then God goes himself and looks for them, finds them, and brings them back. Everyone should celebrate that. Certainly he goes on to say, the angels in heaven celebrate the repentance of the sinner. More so than ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance. I would be surprised if we could find ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance. I think that's part of what Jesus was trying to get across as well. But for those who are seeing and understood themselves as sinners they needed to hear that forgiveness. Acceptance was theirs for repentance, for turning away, and for coming back.

Now if it were simply allegory we could all stop now and the sermon would be over and we could go on with the rest of the service. You know that's not gonna happen right? I think Jesus calls us to more than that. In these parables as with his others, I think Jesus really wants to draw us all in. The story, the parable is not quite so familiar with us. I think Jesus has more involved. I think Jesus wants us to see ourselves in the different roles within the parable. You know certainly there is the role of the lost sheep or the lost coin. I think we need to experience that, we need to understand that we have gone astray, and that we are not righteous before God. That we have done things, we have followed our own ways, and we have separated ourselves from God (some to greater extents, some to lesser extents). But we've all sinned and we've all turned away from God in one way or another in our lives. I think that Jesus wants us to hear that God does not give up on us, no matter how bad the sin may be. God does not give up on us and when we've reached that point where we turn around, where we repent, and where we come back when we want to be embraced by God again. When we want and have the intention to follow God again.

That God rejoices, that the angels rejoice, and that forgiveness is offered. All we have to do is accept that and come back to the flock, come back to the home. Easy for us to see that and put our place in that position. I think Jesus also wants us to see ourselves as the one whose going out and searching. If we have truly understood the joy of being forgiven, what it is to come back to God, and to feel God's forgiveness. For whatever it is that has separated us from his presence, for whatever amount of time.

Having experienced that, don't you think that Jesus wants us to be aware of those around us who have not quite reached that point yet? Aren't we the ones who are called to be the man who goes searching for the lamb? To let that lamb know that there's a home, there's a place, and there's forgiveness. All it requires is coming back. We'll help you and we'll carry you if necessary to come back. Don't you think that we are the woman who knows that there are those who are lost? Maybe someone who is close to us or maybe a family member who has chosen a way that has led them away from God and not to God. For us to go and search and to share with them, remind them that God's forgiveness is already being extended. It's already being offered. All it requires is acceptance of that to come home again. Not to face punishment, but to face that celebration that what was lost is now found and is back in the place where it should be. Don't you think it's for us to look around us right now and observe who isn't here or who hasn't been here? Because they feel that they are unworthy or because they feel they have done something that has separated them from God's love. Having recognized that, us recognizing that, should we not go, search, find, and share with them that there is a home. That simply by turning back,

by coming back, they will find forgiveness and comfort for their souls. Don't you believe that those who have turned away from God feel torment, feel lost, feel hopeless? Just to let them know and to invite them to experience the lifting off of the weight that we have felt when we have been forgiven, and when we acknowledge that we are forgiven by God. We have hope again, and we have a family again. We are able to celebrate together again.

I truly believe that Jesus wasn't simply trying to say that simple allegory. When we depart from God, God waits for us to come back, looks for us, calls us back, and carries us back if necessary. I think he's saying to each of us, look out around you. See the one from whom you may be estranged. It's not just between God and the individual. Sometimes it's between us that forgiveness needs to take place, that repentance needs to take place, that turning around, and that coming back together. Not to face punishment, not to face condemnation, but to receive forgiveness, to be reconciled, and to come together again. Just as important as it is for us to be reconciled with God and God has made that possible so that we can live lives of hope, of joy, and of peace. That we too need to make that available to one another. That when relationship is broken to extend, to look for, and to invite that person to come back into relationship. Not for punishment, not for condemnation but reconciliation. It'd be great if that worked every time, but it doesn't. But it does with God. I was looking, I was hoping, and I was dreaming that all people could come to know and understand the love and forgiveness that he extends to them. A love that is so great that he gave his only son to the end that all believe in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. To come home, may we share that message with those who are not here. To share that message of forgiveness to those who have not heard and accepted him. For that is God's desire. That is God's hope.