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Trinity 3
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Text: Luke 15:1-10

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."

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ,

The epistle we heard today identified for us one of the great enemies of you and all believers in Jesus. That enemy is called a "roaring lion," the adversary. The truth that such an enemy exists is ignored too often today, not among many churches, but among many people who consider themselves faithful Christians. We ignore this truth of this enemy when we become negligent in our prayers and hearing of God's Word. We ignore this truth of this enemy when we become bored with doctrine, as if a deeper understanding of the teachings of God either was unnecessary. We ignore this truth of this enemy when we fail to guard against sinful worry and care, allowing the roaring lion to frighten us with his sounds of fury and rage.

Our Lord is well aware of this enemy, the roaring lion, the devil. Jesus knows that people are the prey for this enemy the lion lies in wait for the weak and wounded, the lazy and apathetic, the willfully ignorant. Jesus seeks to thwart the devices and desires of the roaring lion in order that the lost might be found. Jesus is the one who deliberately goes to find those who are in trouble, those who have wandered away from the good shepherd, those who have forgotten to heed the voice of the Gospel.

Now, we might think that this work of Jesus of finding sinners and forgiving them would be met with approval, or at least with accepting neutrality. After all, is it so bad that Jesus would seek to help people in trouble? It wouldn't seem so, but we must understand that this work of seeking the lost is one of the most offensive works of Christ – in fact, it is the most offensive because it is the Gospel, and the Gospel is a stumbling block and offense. The devil hates the Gospel, and so does the world.

Jesus got a taste of the hatred of the world when He ate with sinners and tax collectors. Jesus desired to eat, to fellowship, with these people who were lost, who needed Him, and who desired to listen to Him. Yet some others who saw this were shocked at what Jesus did. “And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” In other words, how dare Jesus be in such company? How could he spend time in such close contact with people that were known to be sinners? Wasn't He aware of what they were like?

The Pharisees and scribes thought that they knew what God wanted. They thought that they understood the Word of God so well that they could sit in judgment over Jesus, the Son of God. The Pharisees and scribes were motivated by and dominated by the law. The law sets forth rules and standards that must be met in order to be in fellowship with God. Those people with whom Jesus ate did not meet those standards. They had broken the rules. The Pharisees and scribes were comfortable in their criticism of Jesus because they believed they measured up to the standards of God. They were secure in the knowledge that they were not lost – they needed no help from Jesus.

So Jesus tells them three parables, two of which we have heard. The parables are about lost things being found. The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin focus on how much the shepherd and the woman desire to find what that lost sheep and that lost coin. Even though, percentage-wise, the loss of the sheep or coin was not that big of a deal, it still mattered that they were lost. The fact of their lost-ness called out to the shepherd and to the woman. They would not allow that lost-ness to remain. The sheep and coin would be found, no matter how long it took, or how much effort it needed.

It also would not matter just why the state of being lost occurred. Some people today are lost because they have never heard about Jesus, the savior who died for them. Others are lost because even though they have heard the Word of God, they

have allowed the roaring lion, the devil, to deceive them, or they have followed other voices besides that of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. But finally, for the Christian Church, for you and me, it doesn't matter why someone is lost. The fact of the lost-ness is all that matters. This is what the Gospel is.

The Gospel does not judge us. It does not scold us for being weak, or inattentive, or lazy, or distracted. All it does is bring to us what we need: the forgiveness of sins, the healing for our wounds. The Gospel is all about finding the lost, no matter what.

This offended the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day. These men met and saw the Gospel Incarnate – that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. They saw Him, heard Him. But the message of the Gospel was one that they rejected. They decided to rely on themselves; yet even for them Jesus would die on the cross, that perhaps they might become a sinner who repents and brings joy to the angels of heaven who gather around the throne of God.

The reception of the Gospel among the world, whether or not people think they are lost or not, is not what motivates, inspires, or directs the Gospel as preached in the Christian Church. The Gospel sounds forth in the world so that the lost will be found. That is what we desire to do here, in this congregation, in this community. We are not to care if the message of the Gospel is rejected, ignored, despised, or hated. That is not to impact what we do, what we preach, what we hear and believe. Rather, we consider only this: there are lost, and so the Gospel is to be proclaimed. We do not sit in judgment over against those who have strayed, who are wounded, who are lost, who are embittered for some reason. Rather, we bring them the Gospel so that they may receive the forgiveness of their sins. We desire them to repent, to believe in Jesus their Savior, and our Savior. For we are never to lose sight of the fact that we, too, are among those who always need the Gospel, the voice of the Good Shepherd, the healing medicine of the mercy of God.

What mercy God showed to our race, A plan of rescue by His grace:
In sending One from woman's seed, The One to fill our greatest need –
For on a tree uplifted high His only Son for sin would die,
Would drink the cup of scorn and dread To crush the ancient serpent's head. (ELH
302:3)

In Jesus we find the One who will work tirelessly to find us when we go astray, who will continue to insure that His Church is gathered as His Word is preached and taught in truth and purity. The roaring lion need not frighten us, for in Jesus the devil's head has been crushed, as foretold so long ago.

God be with us as each of us lives in repentance and faith, trusting in the blessed Gospel of Jesus that works among us to the will of God. God be with us, too, as we strive to bring to the other sinners of our communities this Jesus, through Word and Sacrament. Jesus is not ashamed to be here with us.

The shepherd and woman who searched for sheep and coin said: '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." And again: "'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."

Let us pray that God would allow joy to be brought to the angels in heaven week after week as we join here around the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.