



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 19, 2010
17th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Luke 15:1-10](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Hosea 3:1-5](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51a](#)
Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 2:5-11](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

Welcome Sinners in Christ's Joy

They are Precious
They are Worth the Effort of Seeking
They Bring Joy in Heaven and on Earth

Did you ever have one of these experiences? It's a nice sunny day and you're about to take a drive some place and you are trying to find your sunglasses. You are looking all over for them. You holler at the kids for moving them on you or something like that. You look all around. Finally you happen to walk past a mirror and you notice they are on the top of your head. Did you ever do something like that? Have you done that with your keys? When you find what was lost, there's a little sense of relief, a little sense of joy, right?

Let's say you are allergic to bees. You get stung. You can't find the medicine you are supposed to have with you all the time. You're looking for it. You're worried. You find it. Relief comes. Is that joy a little bit different than finding the sunglasses on the top of your head? Of course it is. It's a matter of life and death, right?

Isn't that what our Savior is telling us today...that you and I have a role in bringing that kind of life and death joy to angels and saints in heaven, and to God himself as he urges us to welcome sinners in Christ's joy as he tells these parables. But even before he tells these parables, he's teaching, isn't he?

Jesus was at a house with tax collectors and "sinners"...people that couldn't go into the temple because they were sinners. They were prostitutes. They were known thieves. They were whatever the case may be. They were the dregs of society that pharisees would cross the street to get to the other side of so they didn't have to rub shoulders with them or bump into them. They didn't even want that to happen. Where do you find Jesus? Sitting at the table. Sharing a meal with them. Breaking bread with them. We don't think much about that. We'll break bread with anything. We're kind of hungry. We want food. We don't care who we eat with at times. But in that culture, to eat with someone, to break bread with someone was a symbol of your concern and your love for them and that they were important to you. So if you are going there and you are breaking bread with tax collectors and prostitutes, that's just something that shouldn't be done because that's just like saying you're one of them.

Isn't that the whole point? Jesus came to live among sinners. He became one with us, not in our sin, but in our humanity, so that he could come and live among us and be

with us and share the Gospel with us so that we might be saved. The pharisees and the teachers of the Law should have known this better than anybody...that the Messiah was going to be concerned about the dregs of society. Isn't that the picture that we heard in Hosea? When God tells the prophet, "The wife I told you to marry, now she's a prostitute. She's been sleeping with everyone, but you go take her back because I want everyone to see you and her together as a picture of my love for the Israelites because my people are constantly prostituting themselves. They are running off to false gods." In their day, it was Baal and Ashtoreth and all these other things.

In our day, it's the god of self. We prostitute ourselves away from our God because of self, what's important to me, not what's important to God. Our daily question is, what's important for me to do today, not how am I going to get closer to my God.

The amazing thing about Jesus is that he shows the precious nature of sinners by his actions. He doesn't just say, "I love everyone," and then shun people. His love shows forth in actions, even in the action of breaking bread with these people. The question you have to ask yourself is, if we are Christians, if we are going to have Christian character, be little Christs, do our actions match up with our words? We say we don't want to see anyone in hell. Do we put that into action? Do we build relationships with people so that we can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them so they won't go to hell? Or is that just reserved for the people we love, for our family, or our congregation, or the people we are close to? Do our actions match up to our words?

Jesus shows us how precious they are and held up to his actions, of course, we are always going to fall short. But because he lived and died in our place, we know we are forgiven. Because he found us, we know that we are forgiven through his life and death. So we want to thank him for that gift by getting better at having our actions match our words.

Just to show us what these actions are like, he shows us in these parables that these actions take effort...effort. He tells the parable of the guy with 100 sheep. He loses one. He is going to leave the 99 behind and go search for the one. He doesn't just say that one will come back whenever it wants. He doesn't just say the doors are open and they can come in. Or, if they want to know Christ, they can enroll their children in our school. Or, if they want to know Christ, they can walk through our door and worship with us. That isn't what that shepherd does, is it? That wouldn't make good sense.

So Christ came and sought, actively sought out the lost so that they might be saved. The parable depicts action and effort that is put into showing just how precious they are. It takes action. That's what he tells us.

Individually or as a congregation, do we show that we are putting a lot of effort into reaching out to the lost? Or is our effort put into ministering to the found?

I think our Lord would tell us, "I'm telling you these parables so that you listen and you act. I'm telling you this so you can see the effort I put into reaching the world. And I

want you to put some effort into reaching the lost.” He isn’t calling us to light a lamp and sweep our floors. He’s calling us to put some effort into action into sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just hiring someone else to do it for us with our own children, but to do it with our own children. Not just saying “Someone else should be talking to those lost people.” He’s telling us we should be doing it. We should be putting in effort. We should be building these bridges. We should be sharing Christ because Christ has called us to know him, to love him and to share him.

Then, just in case we think “I don’t want to put myself on the line. I don’t want to be rejected. I don’t want to go through that hurt and that pain. I might lose a friend.” God paints us another picture that tells us the friendships we should be most concerned about. Those are eternal friendships. He says it twice just so that we’re clear because he knows we’re kind of thickheaded and we don’t really always get it the first time, so God repeats himself over and over and over throughout Scripture and in Baptism, the Lord’s Supper and all these proclamations of the Gospel because he knows we just don’t get it right away. He tells us that when someone sees the lost as precious, when someone puts the effort into going and sharing the Gospel and the Holy Spirit brings them to faith, brings them back into God’s fold, he says, “There’s more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents than over 99 that don’t need to.” He tells us that we’ve got a role in bringing joy to people’s lives.

You probably know people like that in your daily life, don’t you? People that, when you’re around them, they just bring a smile to your face. They bring joy into your life. They just have a knack for that. God’s telling us, as Christians, we all have a knack for that. We just don’t know it. The knack for bringing joy into someone else’s life is to bring them Jesus Christ, to show them their sin, to show them their Savior, to put the effort in, to see them as precious and then knowing that when we do this and God works faith in our hearts, because you and I can’t...when God works faith in our hearts, we have lit up the faces of angels. We have lit up the face of God with a big broad smile. He tells us that’s where his joy is found, not just as we sit around and look at our own belly buttons and focus on ourselves and say, “Lord, I thank you that I’m not like other people and that you’ve got someone good like me Lord.” God doesn’t need us to tell him what we are or who we are. He knows us. He knows what we’re doing and what we aren’t doing in the task he has called us to.

He has given us the task of making heaven rejoice. Are you up to it? If not, get yourself closer to Jesus. Find in him forgiveness for your sins. Find in him the strength to go and do what he has called you to do and see the things that are of eternal importance. Earthly friendships are here and gone. Eternal friendships last forever. Eternal joy lasts forever.

So, you can welcome sinners in Christ’s joy, or I suppose you can remain silent and hope someone else does before they end up in hell.