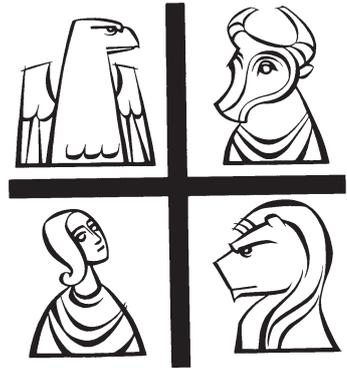


Reading Luke in Lent



Gospel of Luke 15:1–32

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

- ¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners
were all drawing near to hear him.
- ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying,
‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’
- ³ So he told them this parable:
- ⁴ ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them,
does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that 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 his neighbours, saying to them,
‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’
- ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents
than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

- ⁸ ‘Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin,
does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?’
- ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying,
‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’
- ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

- ¹¹ And he said,
‘There was a man who had two sons.
- ¹² And the younger of them said to his father,
‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’
And he divided his property between them.
- ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had
and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.
- ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country,
and he began to be in need.
- ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country,
who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.
- ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.
- ¹⁷ ‘But when he came to himself, he said,
‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread,
but I perish here with hunger!
- ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him,
‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.
- ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”
- ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

21 And the son said to him,
“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.
I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

22 But the father said to his servants,
“Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him,
and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”
And they began to celebrate.

25 ‘Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house,
he heard music and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said to him,
“Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf,
because he has received him back safe and sound.”

28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,
29 but he answered his father,
“Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command,
yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes,
you killed the fattened calf for him!”

31 And he said to him,
“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive;
he was lost, and is found.”

Reflection

The audience for these three parables of mercy brings together the tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes. The three stories speak about the lost being found and that this is something to be rejoiced over. The initial two parables once again pair a man and a woman both of whom seek out that which is lost. The third, longer, parable develops this scenario. The younger son gets into a situation where he will perish (this is the same verb as lost which recurs throughout this passage) and he recognises this, and that the wrong he has done is not just against his father but also against God. He moves from death back to life. The father may not be searching but he is waiting and looking and responds with compassion. Over the centuries this parable has been interpreted in a number of ways. The younger son can be seen as representing the tax collectors and sinners; the older son the Pharisees. Another way of approaching the story has been to recognise that in the far country the younger son has been like a gentile and so, looking forward to Acts, there was a tension in the early Church between the initial Jewish disciples and the Gentile converts. The merciful father, like the good host in the previous section, invites all to the banquet. Luke leaves it open-ended whether the elder son responds to this invitation.

- As much as these are parables of mercy they also remind us of the importance of rejoicing, of giving thanks to God for the blessings he gives us.
 - For what areas in our life do we need the compassion of the merciful Father?
 - For what areas do we need to give thanks?

Prayer

God of compassion,
you await the sinner's return
and spread a feast to welcome home the lost.

Save us from the temptations
that lead away from you,
and draw us back by the constancy of your love,
that we may take our place in your household
and gladly share our inheritance with others.

Grant this through Christ, our liberator from sin,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
holy and mighty God for ever and ever.

Amen.

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