

14th Sunday after Pentecost September 11 2022

Luke 15:1-10

A reminder, in the last chapter Jesus had just been at a dinner party for the leader of the Pharisees. He had been eating with the very people who now grumble and grouse about Jesus receiving and even eating with tax collectors and sinners.

Who fault him for who he shares table fellowship with.

When he hears these complaints, Jesus doesn't chew them out, "Knock it off you knuckleheads", instead he sits back and says, "Let me tell you a story." In both parables, Jesus tells the story in such a way that the natural response would be, "Well of course I would do the same thing. Of course, I would leave the 99 and go searching for the lost sheep and celebrate when I bring it back to the fold. Of course, I would use a precious resource like oil for the lamp to search for the lost coin and when I find it, rejoice with my neighbors. Of course, I would rejoice when something precious that has been lost is found."

The point Jesus is trying to make is that the response of the Pharisees- grumbling, grouching, complaining- is misplaced. Instead, they should rejoice.

Why is it that often the first thing we seem to want to do is grumble, grouse, and complain? Why do we seem to revel in taking umbrage?

We do it when someone else comes into some good news for them- a promotion or raise (well, I worked just as hard. I've been here longer. Bet it's just because they're younger/older/a person of color/a woman/a man- name your specifics) being chosen for a sports team or play, winning the lottery, whatever it is our first reaction is often to grumble and grouse.

When we talked about this on Wednesday night one of our younger participants said it reminded her of the parable of the Prodigal Father, particularly the older son. Do you remember that one? The younger son squanders his inheritance but when he returns is greeted with an extravagant party (prodigal even) given by his father. The older son, stalwart as always, won't come and celebrate- refuses to rejoice with his father over the son returned. He grumbles that he has never had such a celebration from his father.

His father wants both sons at the table, and he reminds his older son that he could have had this feast whenever he wanted. It has always been his. He has lost nothing in this, won't he come in and rejoice with everyone else?

Or the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Remember that one? Where the owner of the vineyard goes out at the beginning of the day and hires workers promising them a day's wage. He then goes out periodically throughout the day hiring workers and saying he will pay them fairly.

When the time comes to pay them off, he starts with those who have only worked an hour or two. Do you remember what he pays them? A day's wage. The same happens with each of the shifts that were hired later in the day. Those who worked all day were rubbing their hands in glee. Man, if they got that- can you guess what we're going to get? And when their turn comes do you remember what they got? A day's wage. I'll say that they grumbled!

The owner came to them and asked them a question, "Why are you upset? Did I not fulfill my part of the bargain we made? Do you not have enough money to feed your family? What is it to you what I do with my money- after all, you got paid. Exactly what I promised."

Repent- it means to change your thinking. To change how you see something. The father tries to help his older son change his thinking. To see that this celebration of his younger brother does not hurt him in any way. Doesn't infringe on his own relationship with his father. Doesn't take one iota from him. That there is no reason to grumble, but instead a reason to rejoice! His brother who was lost has now returned!

The owner of the vineyard tries to help the other workers to change their thinking. To see that this generosity on his part does not harm them in any way. That instead they should rejoice, because now these workers could feed their families for the day. That there were even more people who would not go hungry tonight. So, rejoice, you got paid, your family will be fed, and there will be more work to do tomorrow. So often we are like the Pharisees, the older brother, the workers hired in the morning. When God's grace is shown to those around us, we grumble and complain. As if that grace were a limited supply.

Let me tell you a secret, it's not! The love of God is boundless, without end. It is for sinners and tax collectors and for Pharisees and scribes. It is for those who we think deserve it and for those we are certain do not. And it is for us.

Repent my friends, change your thinking and see something different.

Have you ever seen this optical illusion? What do you see in the picture? Can you see the young woman? How about the old woman? How many can see both. Okay, let me show you each. Now can you see them?

Once you have been shown the image, it still may not be the first thing you see and it may take a bit of effort, but from here on out you'll be able to find that

other image. You've repented. Changed your thinking so you can see things in a new way.

Now the change in thinking Jesus is talking about is not just the sinners who return, it is the Pharisees and scribes. He is trying to get them to see things differently. To see in his choice of who he eats with not something to be criticized but something to rejoice over. To celebrate. For God will pursue God's beloved wherever they are. God strives to be in relationship with everyone- not just those who are considered righteous.

And once we see it. Once we get a glimpse of this new way of thinking, we can get back there again. It might be difficult, but is doable because God in Jesus Christ has shown us how to see. Because the same Holy Spirit that has come to us in the waters of Baptism and the Word of Jesus empowers us to do so.

While we so often are ready to grumble and complain, Jesus calls us to look at the world through eyes ready to celebrate. To rejoice! Rejoice that there will soon be new members of the community of Ely. Rejoice that at least some of those desperate to leave Afghanistan have made their way to the US, to Iowa and have the chance to live again. Literally just to be alive. To rejoice for others who have a chance at life fuller and more abundant!

Remember, the root of the Greek word for joy is the same as grace. I wonder if joy is not the emotional response to grace. Both received and perceived. That feeling of fullness, of God's presence, of bubbling delight when we receive or see others receive God's undeserved love, attention, forgiveness, mercy.

And the good news this morning is that grace is for all. Jesus will eat with anyone- those who have been members of this place that is St. John for decades and those who just walked in the door. Those who have wandered in the wilderness and those who have never left. And when we see one another, Jesus says, do not grouse and complain. Rather, see with the eyes of God. Rejoice, celebrate, give thanks- for as God welcomes the sinner, the lost, the wanderer, so God welcomes you to the table where there is always enough and more than enough. A Meal of bread and wine- Body and Blood of Jesus- a visible sign of this love of God for all and food to strengthen us to go out into the world a changed people.

So fed by this Meal, let us go into the world as people not of grumbling, but of celebration. Let us go into the world always looking for things to rejoice in. Let us go into this world as God's hands and feet, spreading the vision of God's grace to all we meet. So that they might repent, change their vision, and rejoice with us in the overflowing love God has for you, and me, and all whom we meet. Thanks be to God.