

May 11 2014 Mother's Day

Scripture Lessons-

Psalm 23

1 Peter 1:21-25

Luke 15:1-10

Sermon

Lost and Found

In this morning Gospel lesson, we are witnesses to a clash, a clash between really two very different world views, a view of what it means to be a religious respected and respectable person and the view of what it means to be a faithful person. Now with a clash you might expect in the New Testament between the Pharsees and Jesus. The Pharsees to their credit and we don't often give them credit that they deserve had decentralized Judaism by setting up synagogues where the faithful could worship without having to go to the Old Testament Temple. This was especially necessary as Jewish people started to disperse themselves throughout the then known world after the destruction of the first temple. Each day, morning and evening worship consisted, not too much different from the worship which we practice today, prayers, reading of scripture with possible commentary of the scripture by one of the synagogue leaders. The basic teaching of the Pharsees was this, that God so loved each person that God created and that God's will and love is revealed to that person so that person might hopefully have eternal life and resurrection by doing the will of God. Now one of the major differences between the Christians after Jesus' death and resurrection and those same Pharsees, what was the basis of that God's will. For the Pharsees, God's will was revealed in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament and then an oral tradition grew up from that Torah that sought to apply those laws to the changing time as society moved from an agrarian one with shepherds and farmers to one of urban merchants and artisan and traders. Each person would attain salvation by following God's will as revealed in that law –in that law of course as interpreted by their leaders, the Pharsees. Now Jesus in this same period

revealed in the Holy Scriptures too, but the central revelation of the Holy Scripture came in the flesh, came in the person of Jesus. The individual would then learn God's will by not following the law but by seeing the law fulfilled in the life and the teachings of Jesus.

What's the clash? The clash in today's passage in Luke's Gospel between the Pharsees and Jesus begins then when tax collectors, who were no better liked than in those days than they are now, and sinners came to hear Jesus and Jesus welcomed them and Jesus eats with them. Now to eat with somebody in that time was not like being served in a restaurant as it is sometimes today. It was far more than a simple act in preparing and serving food involved here. In those days meals shared in somebody's house was an expression of intimate fellowship, intimate affection. So think of this whole scenario that is being laid out here, this holy man Jesus is going into the homes of people who were considered by the Pharsees, his religious leaders as unholy, people who probably were not in fellowship with that local synagogues, who did not as we would speak would regularly attend church. But more than this Jesus was sharing intimate fellowship with people who did not adhere to the necessary law and to the necessary traditions. They were people who were unrighteousness according to that law according to that Torah, that Jewish's Bible.

Jesus, the bottom line was eating with sinners. Well, in response to this criticism, Jesus tells these two stories that were given today in the Gospels to give us a kind of clue as to what would give God a great sense of joy. As to what causes God to celebrate to put these things into human terms. The two stories also give us gives us an interesting picture of God's activities in the entire world around us. Now in these two stories God is portrayed in two different ways. First of all as a shepherd and secondly as a woman cleaning the house. In the first story, we are the near sighted sheep getting lost, following our noses for more grass, more grass to fill our bellies and in the second story we are the lost coins. We are helpless to move ourselves to be found by anybody. In both stories we are of ultimate value to God but we are lost. God has to find us. We are worthy of a celebration when we are again safe in God's arms. And when we are safe in God's arms we are able to admit we are

silly, silly sheep sometimes. And it is flat difficult to find coins sometimes. We are able to confess our sins, confess our mistakes and repent and put all of these things behind us and move on with life. And yet some of us think about these things and find it very difficult to imagine that God wanting to throw us a party or let alone throw anybody else in the world a party either because we don't really understand who God is.

In this passage there are at least two equally, I think dangerous misconceptions about God in circulation. The first dangerous misconception is that God is an angry wrathful God waiting upstairs there someplace just for us to do the wrong thing so that God can pounce on us as quickly as possible. With that misconception of God we have to be fearful every day of our life so that we do not do anything wrong. Now sometimes those of us, who have had a pretty hard time in life, may have this image of God. We have a hard time but these stories of Jesus show us a very different picture of God indeed. If we make mistakes if we lose our way God does something strange God seeks us out because God loves us more than we will ever know and wants a deep and trusting friendship with each one of us

But the secondly equally dangerous misconception is because God loves me in this wonderful way, anything I do in life is just fine. This says that nothing I do makes any difference in the world I think one of the great problems in the world today in fact is that people have a lot of trouble finding meaning in their lives; finding a sense of purpose to live so to speak. Now several years ago sociologists did a funny study to find a way to increase productivity in a certain factory. First of all, they played music in the factory and they found that productivity greatly increases people had some music to do their work with. And when they removed the music, the sociologists found that productivity remained very high and they were puzzled as well they might be. When interviewed the workers they found the key to the increased productivity was not the music in its self but it is was the real indication that somebody in the upper management was interested in them and that someone cared about what they were doing down there on the factory floor. If nobody cares about what we do it is pretty easy to

fall into that age old attitude problem, why should I even try; why put out an effort; what in the world difference does it make; who cares. If God doesn't care about what we do, what difference in the world does it make anything make; why should we love or reach out to that difficult person we are having troubles with; why should we try to go without one more outfit of clothes so that we can give a little bit more in the world where it is needed; why should we buy that lesser cut of meat so we can give more to the food bank; why should we make the extra effort to go to Bible study or Sunday School or even to the worship service, regularly. You know, God loves us no matter what why we even bother; why even try; what is the world different does it make. Well, you know, it makes all the difference in the world to God. Do you know that every time we realize we have blown it in this life? That every time we acknowledge we have done something in life, that God does not want us to do and we ask God to forgive us and to help us to more faithful Christians, that God feels like throwing a great big party as a result and that is what the lesson in Luke's Gospel for today is. Do you realize that God's Holy Spirit is working right now to keep each of us out to help us realize that we are loved and that we are forgiven by God? Each Sabbath Day is God's sometimes wayward folk gather together that we are reminded of two very important things. First of all God loves us and God cares for us so much through Jesus is the Good Shepherd, God wants to guide us in right paths and seeks us out when we go astray. And secondly because of his deep love and concern God cares about us so much so that we ought to make something of ourselves. Through this time of worship then may we be transformed from just simple sheep to shepherds to keep the law, to bind up the wounds of the broken hearted to strengthen to encourage, to empower, to nourish the every people sitting here and in our families, in our work in our schools and in our homes

And together we say AMEN