

The gospel of Luke is written with a Gentile or Greek-speaking cultured people in mind. In writing the gospel account Luke focuses upon the role and importance of women and the poor, more than the other three gospels, and relates the most parable teachings of Jesus in his story of who Jesus is, how he was and is in the world, and how that changes even us.

Chapter 15 is a set of 3 parables spoken into to context of trouble at table, where the “better off” grumble and mumble at being associated with the “less off” (or sinners). The story seems to be about living in bubbles or silos and how that impedes us from seeing what God has both created and calls us to experience, know and love.

eats with them: It was common to give food to the poor. But eating with someone, welcoming someone in to your house, was quite another thing, not usually done by “respectable” people, like Pharisees and scribes. It had a connotation of association, fellowship, social equality and spiritual brotherhood. What’s curious is that the phrase is that Jesus eats with the deplorable folks, and thus by association with Jesus the Pharisees and scribes deemed themselves (and maybe larger society?) tainted.

SHEPHERDS: It’s most likely several shepherds, as the flock (a large one for poor folk) would have most likely belonged to a community or village. So several shepherds would have guarded the goods of the whole community. Allegorically in scripture shepherds were well considered, noble figures, but historians tell us they were barely tolerated in society for they were unclean and often despise as their flocks intruded upon and ate “private property.” It was a cultural faux-pas for Jesus to compare such high society folks (Pharisees and scribes) with their opposites (shepherds, and by association poor women).

Rejoice/ celebrate: the joy is both of the shepherds who find the lost sheep and also of the whole community, to whom the flock probably belonged. It’s not an individual rejoicing as much as a communal one. It would be natural to thus share the news with everyone that the lost sheep had been found. The same applies to the parable of the woman and the sons.

coins: were rare. Most trade was done through bartering. So it’s completely understandable that a person, let alone a poor woman, would turn their house upside down to find such a lost treasure. It would be also normal to tell all of your neighbors about what you’d found, to rejoice with them. This was in a time before screens, based on story-telling. You would recount your day to others to build community, make meaning and share what you had lived.

divided his property what: the sons of a man would inherit his property [assets] but this was never usually divided while he still lived in good health. In his demand, the younger son treats the father as if he’s already dead. He cuts himself off from his community: family & extended family. The father doesn’t have to acquiesce to this weird desire of the son, but he chooses to do so out of love nonetheless.

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 3.19.2017

Luke 15:1-32

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and *eats with them*.”

³ So [Jesus] told them this parable:

⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep [DIRECT ADDRESS] and losing one of them, [ONE] does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness [99] and go after the one that is *lost* [THE LOST]

until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, [FIND] he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. [JOY]

⁶ And when he comes home, [RESTORATION] he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘**Rejoice** with me, [JOY] for I have found my sheep [FIND] that was *lost*.’ [THE LOST]

⁷ **Just so, I tell you**, there will be more joy in heaven [DIRECT ADDRESS] over one sinner who repents [ONE] than over ninety-nine righteous persons who [99] need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman having ten silver **coins**, [THE LOST] if she *loses* one of them, [FIND] does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘**Rejoice** with me, [JOY] for I have found the coin [FIND] that I had *lost*.’ [THE LOST]

¹⁰ **Just so, I tell you**, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

¹¹ Then Jesus said,

“There was a man who had two sons.

¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’

So he **divided his property** between them. [A SON IS LOST]

¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in **dissolute living**. [GOOD WASTED]

¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

[THE GREAT SIN] ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

[TOTAL REJECTION] ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself

The relationship between the father and younger son is broken. Culturally the older son was to assume the role of reconciler. His silence means his refusal of both the role and possibly the relational connection. In the Middle East ownership of land is an attachment of identity, inextricably linked to family. The haste of the son to depart, abroad (to a foreign, non-Jewish land) is in part out of shame, rejection of his people, identity and customs. This disunion, rupture of the family involves both sons, for both fail to live in unity.

dissolute living: scholars say that the meaning of this is more along the lines of “wasteful,” “luxurious” and “expensive” than as “immoral.”

dying of hunger : people in that day were used to fainties. We know that there were 10 in and around Jerusalem between 169 BCE and 70 AD. It would have been a powerful image for those who heard it.

THE PODS THAT THE PIGS: the citizen gives the younger son the worst job imaginable for a Jew – to care for pigs (the epitome of unclean animals). Maybe he gave him this job to get rid of him. Yet the son is still not ashamed enough to accept the job of pig herder. It’s when he is reduced to eating what the pigs eat, being an adversary of the most unclean animals, that he finally snaps.

he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him: the father does this in front of the whole village, he should do the opposite, make the son grovel and revel in the public shaming of his son in order to restore his pride. Here he lifts up his robes and runs shamelessly to embrace his son face to face, preventing the son from dropping (as expected) to his knees to beg forgiveness. He returns in shame. The father greets him with gracious equality and shamelessly fierce love.

fatted calf: this was a special animal reserved (intended) for special holiday or celebratory meals. It’s like the Thanksgiving Turkey, or Christmas Ham, or special bottle of wine you save for a wedding.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

***What strikes you in this passage ? How does it interact with what you’re living these days, or thinking about?**

***How do you wrestle with the question of being lost and found? How do you wrestle with the question of being associated with those you may consider to be more “lost” than yourself, such as the Pharisees saw the tax collectors, shepherds and other societal *deplorables* they called...**

“sinners”? How did they live in a bubble? How did that impede them from seeing what Jesus is trying to communicate to them, and which God wanted for all people?

***How do you experience the love of God as fierce and shameless? How does that love of you impact and shape the way you love others, in particular those you may want to avoid, not be seen in public with, or who disgust you?**

[A CHANGE OF MIND]

[AN INITIAL REPENTANCE]

[TOTAL ACCEPTANCE]

with THE PODS THAT THE PIGS were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am **dying of hunger!**

¹⁸ I will get up 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 like one of your hired hands.”

²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ Then 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 slaves, ‘Quickly, [GOOD USED] bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

²³ And get the **fatted calf** and kill it, and let us eat and **celebrate;**

²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive [A SON IS FOUND] again; he was *lost* and is found! And they began to **celebrate.**

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the **fatted calf**, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to **celebrate** and **rejoice**, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was *lost* and has been found.’”