

Being Hospitable  
Luke 15:1-10  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
September 11, 2016 / 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Today's selection comes from the huge section of Luke's Gospel, where Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem for the last time before the Crucifixion. And Chapter 15 is made up of three Parables on things lost and found: The Parables of the Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and of the Prodigal Son.

The chapter is set-up in the first two verses. Jesus is responding to the criticism from the Pharisees and the Scribes, that He “welcomes,” or literally from the Greek, “be host to,” sinners and eats with them. Their issue is that of table fellowship, and Jesus' acceptance of these social outcasts at His table. This is unthinkable to the Pharisees and to many others at that time, to actually break bread with a tax collector.

The two Parables, of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, are very much the same lesson, highlighting the intensity and hard work that goes into locating what is sought, showing the intensity of their search, and the efforts that went into them. Risking the rest of the flock to find one; or turning an entire house upside down until the coin is recovered.

What is happening here, the reason that Jesus is telling these parables, is that Jesus was being criticized for being too hospitable. His critics are apparently differentiating between people and the “right” people. And the people that Jesus is ministering to, are not considered the “right” kind of people. However, Jesus is having none of that sort of nonsense.

Unfortunately, in many organizations and in churches, this happens; and instead of finding people to bring in to the community, they drive them away, because they are not the “right” people, according to them.

I encountered this sort of thing when I was serving in AmeriCorps and was looking for a church to attend in Worcester. At one church, they treated me with suspicion and someone even followed me to the lavatory. I did not return to such an unwelcoming environment.

I took that sort of experience to heart.

When I serve as a chaplain at large events, I interact with many different kinds of people; and I am very conscious of how churches and religion are portrayed in the media, and their reputations in recent years, and so, I am always careful.

I've lost track of how many times the following scene has played out over the years: I would be sitting and talking with someone, who tells me that they used to go to church, but not anymore. They felt judged and unwanted. They saw others being judged, ostracized, and driven away. They saw an unwelcoming environment. They experienced these things in the House of Jesus, and so they left.

They also told me that if their pastor or priest, and congregation didn't judge them, if they were more open & friendly, more welcome, and more enthusiastic, they probably wouldn't have left their churches.

If their churches were those things, they would have more members and more participation. Jesus welcomes all, and He doesn't judge. Jesus creates a safe space of fellowship, where everyone is invited. How could any church do what Jesus wouldn't do?

I also noticed a similar issue at the monthly meetups held by my artist community. These meetups are free and can function as an easy gateway into the community and also to the larger events. When new people attend, to see what it's like, they are obvious. They look different and they are not known to the rest of us, and so we term them “muggles.” We obviously had a problem welcoming outsiders in to our community.

Some of us realized this, and decided that this attitude had to change. So a group of us now approach the outsiders first and be like a host, making them feel welcome, banishing their fears of judgment, and introducing them around to everybody else. We are also knowledgeable of the other programs, inviting them to other events, and introducing them to those who will be there, so if they do go, they will already have a familiar face or two waiting

for them.

It can be difficult for someone to join in with an already established group, and that group must recognize this if they want to grow; they must make the effort to be welcoming, and like Jesus, not judge who walks in, and not be worried about the “right sort” of people, but create a welcoming safe space of fellowship, where they are friendly, and knowledgeable about programming, and enthusiastic in invitations.

Each and every one of us must be a host, following Jesus' example: Welcoming. Non-Judgmental. Enthusiastic. No one is perfect, but we must do our very best whenever someone new steps through our doors! We must be enthusiastically hospitable, and remember that it is on all of us to help any visitor to feel welcome and that this is a safe space of fellowship, full of Christ's Love for us all.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

Welcoming God, thank you for Jesus' lesson in these parables, and His example of true and loving hospitality. May we always remember it, and may we follow it, each of us a gracious host, welcoming all, in His name, Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of mercy and healing, you who hear the cries of those in need, receive these petitions of your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage.

Most Patient God, we recognize that we do not always act as we should, and that we are not as hospitable as Christ demands of us. We ask that you forgive us for all the times when we have lost our way. Shower your mercy upon us, and lead us safely home to faithfulness.

Gracious God, we pray that be with all who need you, and restore to us the joy of your salvation. May refugees be restored to safety. May lands of flood, famine, or scorch be restored to fertility. May broken hearts be restored to wholeness. May fearful lives be restored to peacefulness. May those who are fatigued be restored to hopeful perseverance. May those unwell find wellness. Grant all a willing spirit to sustain, and move our hearts to be of whatever assistance we are called by You to offer.

We pray that You help guide us through our own troubles, helping us to see the way You want us to walk. Supply us with the boldness that your Holy Spirit supplies, that we might be strength for the weak and a voice for the silenced. Empower us with the sureness of your presence as we walk on Your way.

We especially pray for:

Those affected by the terrorist attacks 15 years ago today.

God of mercy and healing, You who hear the cries of those in need, receive these, the petitions of your people, that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage. Amen.

### Psalm 51:1-10

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

### Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 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.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

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