

For those who are new or visiting today and those who aren't in the habit of regularly worshipping with this community, we've been working our way through Luke 12 -15; we began our studies in Luke on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2014 – it's just that there have been many Christian season occasions, visiting speakers and other series. Anyway, as the Mainland Cheese advert goes, 'Good things take time.'

In chapter 14 Jesus was found at the house of a prominent Pharisee where he told two stories. This is followed, as we know from last week's message, by a large crowd scene where Jesus makes some statements about what discipleship truly means – its cost and implications. It's not clear where his close friends were in any of this – the group we call Jesus' disciples; they're not mentioned, nor are they at the beginning of chapter 15 which is today's text.

### Luke 15:1-10

**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'**

A mixed and interesting audience to hear Jesus – a bit like today really – there are those among us who like the Pharisees think they have God sorted – that it's about rules; they know what God likes and doesn't like – actually some are very clear about that; you can tell by what they post on their Facebook pages; there are those among us who know their Bibles like the teachers of the law knew their Scriptures – hopefully they know that knowledge and application are vastly different things; there are those among us who know what they do isn't what God would approve of – like the tax collectors and there are those who don't really feel they're good enough for God because they're sinners. I'll leave you to decide where you fit.... I feel where I fit has much to do with God's grace.

What we do know from the text is that the Pharisees (P's for short) and teachers of the law (TOL's for short) don't approve of the way Jesus lives – especially welcoming and eating with 'sinners.'

We need to understand who the sinners were – because it's not quite like the way we think of the word. Sinners in Jesus' day were those who didn't keep the law in the way the P's did. There was a complete barrier between the P's and these people – they were called names and it wasn't right to have anything to do with them let alone marry them, do business with them or have social contact- not unlike some of the barriers that exist in our world.

How uncomfortable to have such people gathered with them around Jesus? It seems the P's and the TOL's attitude was that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who's obliterated; they looked forward not to the saving but the destruction of sinners. Nice!

That Jesus would welcome them and eat with them is too much for them.

So, a story or three to help the P's and the TOL's get their heads around what Jesus was living for.

### STORY I

**3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.**

Not such a familiar story in our predominantly city lives – any shepherds among us – oh yes Jeff, Graham..... The scene Jesus describes is typical of an agricultural society.

And the land wasn't like the verdant pastures of Southland and Otago - pasture was scarce, cliffs abounded, deep cuttings could catch one by surprise and of course the desert was all encompassing. It was tough looking after sheep in that setting.

The shepherd must have taken a quick count and discovered one was missing. We might think, well he's got 99% isn't that enough – if it was an NCEA course in shepherding he'd have got an excellence. The shepherd didn't think like that, possibly motivated by the economic value of one sheep, possibly because he knew his sheep. All he knew was that the sheep were in his care and he'd lost one of them – a profound sense of responsibility

So, he searched high and low (until.... he found it). He's stoked. So stoked that he rushed home with the said sheep – around his shoulders; invited all the friends and neighbours around to hear the good news. Did he tell his wife he was doing this? Who knows? Maybe she was like Trudy and would have taken it in her stride

Then Jesus leaves the story to make an interesting observation – in the same way as the shepherd rejoiced – actually that's what it's like in heaven when one sinner repents.

Questions:

Who's the shepherd – is it Jesus, is it God? My heart tells me it's God who longs for all his children to be found and of course that's why he sent Jesus, the shepherd of the sheep?

Who are the sheep? Several possibilities – all humanity; or the lost P's and TOL's or the lost tax collectors and sinners; the wonderful news is that the lost one was found, and all heaven rejoiced. As a community we try to take this seriously.

The first part of our Mission Statement reads:

**Our mission is to bring people into relationship with God through Jesus Christ and into relationships within the family of God.....**

That's partly why we run a number of ministries so that people might find a way into our community, and hopefully into the kingdom – Play Groups, Divorce Care, Breakfast Church, Girls' Brigade, Youth ministries, Motor Cycle ministries, CAP, Knitting for Africa **and** others so that the lost may be found – all the ways in which you reach out to those around you add to this; it's also behind supporting what we do overseas; and that's why we teach about ways in which we can walk across the room to not yet followers of Jesus so to speak and encourage one another to live missionally - all to the end that the lost may be found. In this sense we're no different to Paul who wrote:

**Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law ....so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law ....., so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.**

Wow! How do you think we're going?

Jesus is really on a roll here. Not content with sheep he now uses the image of a lost coin;

## STORY 2

**8 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'**

Note first that much of this is almost total repetition:

**8 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'**

We'd never put the same value on a coin as a sheep but if we knew why it was so important to the woman we might. There are two possibilities. She may have been very poor, and that coin might have been the difference between having enough and going without. I remember as a boy when we went through all the pockets, all the places where money might be in our house to get enough to buy some very basic food items – thankfully it was a rare occasion. That might have been the reason.

The second and perhaps more compelling argument is that the coin was from her head dress. The mark of a married woman was her head dress. It contained 10 silver coins that were linked by a chain. To lose one would be like losing one's wedding ring today – it was more than extremely valuable; she searched as we might search for a lost wedding ring. It had a value beyond the mere value of the coin.

The sheer and utter joy when at last after much searching, the coin was found, would bring her unutterable joy. As I wrote this I couldn't help remembering the unutterable joy we felt the night the hospital rang to say Rebekah, our daughter had woken up after swallowing poison.

God is as joyful about a person who repents and turns to Jesus as the woman was finding her coin! The joy when a sinner comes home. And the thing is no Pharisee ever thought of God like that – it was totally outside their way of thinking.

Lost sheep, lost coin, lost us! I find this text challenging in the extreme. God is passionate about the lost, God rejoices when a sinner comes home.

Questions:

Who believes God and the angels rejoice when sinners are found?

Who tries to live this out on a regular basis?

What would have to change in you and in us to live this out?

It really depends: are we more like the Ps' and the TOL's or more like the tax collectors and the sinners.

## PRAYER

Break my heart with the things that break your heart

Let me be joyful about the things that make you joyful