

September 15, 2019

"How does God feel about you?"

Luke 15: 1-10

Pastor Jonathan

It's good to be back. I'm trusting the Lord for this year. I trust you're trusting Him too. Yes? We have much to go through together. God knows what we need.

How do you feel about yourself this morning? Don't raise your hand. Just keep that thought. Are there conflicting feelings about yourself? Do you know how you feel, or are you not sure at all? What do you usually do with these feelings? If you are feeling poorly about yourself, are there activities or further thoughts that you regularly pursue? If you are feeling good about yourself, are there activities or further thoughts that you regularly pursue from that frame of mind? Now, keep this in mind or write down a note or two for future reference.

One good thing about moving...you get to go through your books, over and over and over again. You find hidden treasures, now and then. It's something like hearing from an old friend with whom you've lost track. You meet and embrace and catch up on what's happened in the last ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, you fill in the blank, years.

I found Murphy's Law: and other reasons why things go wrong. Do you remember that one?

Murphy's Law has a simple thesis: If anything can go wrong, it will. But did you know there are corollaries (things that flow logically from the thesis):

1. Nothing is as easy as it looks.
2. Everything takes longer than you think.
3. If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will cause the most damage will be the one to go wrong. Corollary: If there is a worse time for something to go wrong, it will happen then.
4. If anything simply cannot go wrong, it will anyway.
5. If you perceive that there are four possible ways in which a procedure can go wrong, and circumvent these, then a fifth way, unprepared for, will promptly develop.
6. Left to themselves, things tend to go from bad to worse.
7. If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.
8. Nature always sides with the hidden flaw.
9. Mother nature is a b...
10. It is impossible to make anything foolproof because fools are so ingenious.
11. Whenever you set out to do something, something else must be done first.
12. Every solution breeds new problems.

All of these comical yet often reality-based insights help us remember we need to trust the Lord, through the difficult, the tragic, the joyful and the confusing. This year coming will certainly be that kind of year. We need God. We need a relationship with God. And we know Jesus is our teacher, master and friend. We also need patience with each other as we seek to hear and respect one another, yet also follow Jesus together, and Jesus' truth, as found in Scripture.

We continue to listen to Dr. Luke in his gospel describe Jesus' teaching in another context in Luke, Chapter 15. Earlier in the year we heard the teaching on the Lost Son, which is really about the Creative

Longing and Searching of the Father, for all of us who are lost. Earlier in the chapter we find Jesus teaching on the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Now please hear the context for these two.

Dr. Luke sets up the whole chapter of Jesus' teaching on the Lost...Sheep, Coin and Son in the context of talking to "tax collectors and sinners." Now when you hear "tax collector," please don't think of our friends at the CRA or the IRS, even though we might have many feelings about our paying taxes and how they are collected or even at what rate they are collected. Those are all valid conversations but the Scriptural context for "tax collectors" is first century Israel where Roman military occupation had taken place and the foreign government was in control. The tax collectors were Jewish locals who were seen as sell-outs or collaborators in the worst sense, as in WWII French or Dutch collaborators, selling out their own family members and friends for profit. Matthew, the writer of the first Gospel, was one of these. They were despised, not even so much for the tax collecting per se, but for the greed and graft, and the betrayal of those closest to them. They were expelled from the local synagogue, and their families often were as well.

The other members of Jesus' audience in Chapter 15 were the sinners, those known for their public sin: sex trade workers, organized crime members and the equivalent of gang members and ex-convicts. Between these folks with a reputation in the community and the tax collectors, it was commonly thought that these had no hope in approaching God or God's kingdom. But Jesus sat down with them and ate with them, indicating He didn't despise them in the way their communities had cut them off. Just as Jesus sat down with them, Jesus sits down with you and me, and doesn't count our sins against us, but eats with us, talks with us, cares for us, not matter what we have in our past, or in our present.

This drove the religious leaders wild. They just could not figure out how a prophet or teacher (rabbi) like Jesus would spend time with this riff-raff that has no standing with God. So Jesus tried to teach the religious leaders why he spent time with those they despised and felt were rejected by God. In Mark 2: 16-17, Jesus simply tells them that only the sick need a doctor, not those who are well. But of course, you and I know that everyone needs a doctor. Just like everyone of us must know we are sinners in need of God. But perhaps the religious leaders in Jesus' day did not know that, so he was trying to teach them and those who already knew they were sinners, outcasts in need of love and salvation from sin.

In these days, you and I need to know that we are all sinners, we all rebel against God, that the confession of sins we do in this service is for all of us, for me, for you, for every church leader here and any distinguished guest. There aren't greater and lesser sins. Sure, some sins have more consequences for us and others, but sin is sin, and a rebellion toward God. As we speak to others, even if we are more mature in our faith, we need patience and care for them, particularly when they are wrong and we are right. We are not here to correct one another. Jesus is here to correct us all. We all are His. Let us remember that every time we get together. Yes, we need zeal for the truth. Yes, we need zeal for Scripture. Yes, we need to hold on to everything God is telling us. But we can still do so in a kind and patient way. Can't we? I get angry. I lose my patience. I think everyone should believe exactly the way I do. Then I remember Jesus is my master. I am directing you and others to Him. He is the One who holds you and them and me accountable. Not me. Not you. So, as we speak to each other about a number of topics this year, please keep this in mind. We all want to honour Jesus Christ here. We all want the Scripture's direction here. There may be moments of disagreement and contradiction. Let us ask the Lord to guard our language and our tone. I know how bad mine can be. You too seek the Lord for guarding what you say to a fellow brother or sister in Christ.

Jesus hangs out with the bad, well known sinners. Jesus hangs out with you and me. Jesus teaches us. He also wants to teach the religious leaders and anyone else who wants to listen.

So now we are this far into the sermon, and only have covered the first two verses of Luke 15. You probably know the story of the 99 sheep and the one lost. You also should know that like the Parable of the Lost Son,

the parable is more about the attitude of the Shepherd than the lost sheep. The good Shepherd cares so much about that one lost sheep that he leaves all the rest behind to go find him or her. He loves you that much. This is what Jesus is teaching about anyone who feels lost, and needs God. God's eye is on you, He is spending His resources to find you and to win you to Himself. He wants to rescue you from the danger of your sins, and the certainty of life without God and life without purpose. If you are a sinner in need of God, know how He feels about you. He drops everything to find you, to be with you, to be known by you.

And remember the shepherds in the vicinity of the road between Jerusalem and Jericho had steep hills and mountains, dusty, rocky and sharp terrain. It would be easy for a wandering sheep to not only get lost, but also to be injured and wounded in such a way so as to be incapacitated. I saw it on our trip to Israel in November of 2017, where the shepherds would go through hostile terrain, physically hostile, and then no apparent grazing or water of any kind... The Shepherd goes after that one sheep with deep compassion and full energy to rescue that one.

Now if you are part of the safe flock, part of the 99, that are already saved, then rejoice with another one who is saved. Party with the Saviour over the one sheep found that was lost. Continue to join with the Good Shepherd to find the lost, make sure they are found and rejoice when they return or are newly added to the fold. The outreach and the care for the critically lost or wounded is part of what we are to be constantly monitoring as church. How are we doing in this area? We must continue to invite those estranged from God, under-churched or never reached with the Gospel. People need to know their need, and see that need fulfilled here alongside the rest of us needy ones.

It's interesting that the Scripture says there is more rejoicing over the one sinner who repents than the 99 who do not need to repent. (repent=doing a U turn in God's direction) (Luke 15: 7) Now you know that this does not mean that only 1% of the population needs to repent, and that 99% do not need to repent. It is clear Jesus is addressing the religious leaders who think they don't need to repent, who think they are not sinners. All of us need to repent. And in our repentance, we need to continue to be honest about our sins and our relationship to Jesus. We also need to cultivate partying and celebrating one person coming into the kingdom. If there are several or dozens or hundreds, great. But let's party for the one. Jesus does.

And the lost coin. There is a housewife who has a silver coin collection. She loses one. She is obsessed with that lost coin. She drops everything she is doing, sweeps the whole house to find, remember we might be talking dirt floors...and she finds it. She rejoices greatly and invites her friends over to have a party with her. It is the best day of her life, more than finding keys or glasses or cell phones.

And once again, the emphasis of the Parable is not the coin, or the monetary value or the coin or the set of coins. It is the attitude of the Owner. Like her, God drops everything to find a sinner who knows his/her need, and indeed helps a sinner know his/her need. We need to celebrate like God celebrates over one conversion, one return to church, one coming to know God, no matter what their background was. Let us do so here at Grace.

We need everyone here. We celebrate everyone here. We celebrate the work of God here in each of our lives. Let us have the eyes of faith, trusting God for bringing new ones here, finding their spiritual home here. And let us even this year find many times to celebrate.

Let us pray.