**Repent and Rejoice**

Based on [Luke 15:1-10](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk15.1-10)

Preached on June 28, 2020

Third Sunday after Trinity

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Spring is over now, but every year comes a time for spring cleaning. And every year I can’t help shaking my head at the prospect of cleaning out the junk that has accumulated in the garage, sheds and other rooms over the winter. So much stuff. Life would be so much easier with less. Less things, less mess, less clutter. Less is more. Jesus says, be on your guard, for life does not consist of the abundance of one’s possessions. It is not the quantity of money or possessions that matters, but the quality of what you have.

Quality over quantity. This translates to relationships as well. It is better to have a few close friends than to have many superficial relationships. And this is a Godly perspective. God would rather have a few people in heaven who genuinely love and trust Him, than have a whole world of people who have only a veneer of false piety and a heart of self-centredness, vanity and pride. And because he hand-picks each and every one of his elect, he gives them reason to rejoice.

Today, the gospel teaches this aspect of God’s salvation--that many are called, but few are chosen, that one saved sinner is worth more than ninety-nine unrepentant hypocrites. Actually, Jesus says one penitent sinner is worth rejoicing more than ninety-nine who have no need of repentance. But everyone needs repentance. The first of Martin Luther’s famous ninety-five theses says that “When our Lord Jesus Christ bids us to repent, he means that the whole christian life is to be one of repentance.”

And Jesus warned of the Pharisees who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt (Luke 18:9). But no one is righteous in themselves, no not one person. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In this sense, there is no such thing as the ninety-nine righteous. There are only sinners in need of repentance...no perfect sheep, only lost sheep...and lost goats I suppose. But as a baptized child of God, you are his sheep and belong to his flock.

In all trials, troubles, tribulations and times of testing, you are to regard yourself as a lost sheep in need of rescue from the good shepherd. You have been baptized and gifted with the faith that knows you can call upon your heavenly father in all things, and he will answer. Who are you? You are a child of God. Rejoice, in all circumstances, because you are chosen for eternal life.

In times of trouble and struggle with sin, death, the devil and the world, remember that you may be a lost sheep, but you are a sheep nonetheless. Remember the 23rd Psalm. When you pray “The lord is my shepherd...he anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows”...that means that the Good Shepherd has chosen you. For you all things are possible. For you he has prepared a table in the presence of your enemies. Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

On the one hand, in this fallen world, all people are lost in the sense that everyone on the face of the earth is in need of repentance, lifelong repentance, sincere repentance, and a daily saviour. On the other hand, there is a sense that there are sheep who are safe at home in the sheepfold and others who have strayed away from the sanctuary, but Jesus is willing to bring them back.

This would be the tax collectors and sinners that are grumbled against in today's gospel. This would be those who were baptized into christ and his church on earth, but gradually stopped gathering for worship. This would be those who were of the flock, but gradually began adopting the practices of the world and have forgotten the word of life. This would be those who self-identify and practice a life against their baptism. They once were found but now are lost, and that causes the weeping of the holy host of angels in heaven and the congregation of saints on earth.

People fall away from the church and the sanctified life of christ. A lesson of Jesus’ parable is that we who are “found” should not grumble against those who leave or fall away. Because Jesus will seek after them and carry them like lost sheep on his cross-bearing shoulders. He will gather them like a mother hen gathers her chicks, if they are willing. And if he is willing to go uncomplaining to the cross to carry your sins, you who are in need of repentance and mercy...how much more should you rejoice at the prospect of a fallen brother or sister being picked up and brought home. After all, it is for them that God delays sending his Son. Scripture says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

There are two perspectives on these parables of the lost, and both present teachings useful to our faith. The first is that all people are “lost” in the sense that all people need to repent often, daily, and for the rest of their life. All are “lost” in that they are in need of saving and therefore a saviour, Jesus Christ. And we who have been saved are not to be secure in ourselves, but to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling--that is in daily repentance, fearing, loving and trusting God above all things.

The second perspective is that--of those who have received baptism, inherited the Name of God and the identity as His Child--some are safe among his flock, and others have strayed and become lost. It is not for us to condemn those who have fallen away, because in so doing, we only serve to congratulate ourselves. But scripture says to us, “He who thinks he stand, take heed, lest he fall.” The lost sheep has fallen, just as we are all capable of doing. Do not use the lost brother as an occasion for your grumbling; but in prayer regard him as more important than yourself...and prepare to rejoice on the last day, when christ will gather all his once lost sheep into the eternal sanctuary of heaven.