

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
September 5, 2010**

Luke 15:1-10

Are you ready to celebrate?

1. *A scary moment at the party*
2. *Another celebration, the same result*
3. *Your thoughts as a sheep*
4. *What can happen to sheep in the church*
5. *How can we seek to overcome that?*

***Hymns: 232 – 304
Distribution: 385- 135
Closing: 259***

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Luke 15:10-10

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 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 persons who do not need to repent.

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

The family was altogether for their holiday picnic. Everyone was having a great time as they celebrated one last time before the school year began. Finally, the time came for everyone to get going. Each parent went in search of their kids, it was time to round them up. As shoes

were tied and goodbyes were said, panic was setting in for Aunt Carla. She began to move a bit faster around the house, moving outside. Her panic spread as others took notice. She asked if anyone had seen little Maggie. "No" was the repeated answer. Now, the search began in earnest. Neighbors became involved. "Where is little Maggie?" Everyone was concerned. Finally, there was a shout, "I've found her!" Everyone gathered around as Uncle Bill came into sight with a teary-eyed Maggie in his arms. Everyone was joyful. How could they not be? They celebrated and huddled around the little girl who was lost.

But there were a couple of youngsters that were not sharing in the joy. Maggie's brother Timmy and his cousin Jonny were wondering what all the celebration was about. It was Maggie's fault that she got lost. "Shouldn't she actually be in trouble?" Jonny asked. "If there is going to be all this joy, shouldn't it be for us?" Timmy reasoned. "After all we didn't get lost." Pretty selfish attitude of those boys not to join in the celebration, isn't it?

Shift your focus now to another celebration. There is a party and celebration because the lost have been found. All kinds of sinful people who were lost in the ways of their sin were being rescued. What had found them was a message of Law and Gospel that a man named Jesus had come to preach to them. He came preaching to all people that their lives of sin weren't acceptable. He told them very clearly that it needed to change. But he also came with the good news that God had an answer; and it was for everyone, even the worst of sinners. This man named Jesus would take care of the problems that their dishonest, troubled lives had caused between them and God. "Just trust in me," he said. And the people did. They celebrated and came flocking to Jesus. Huge crowds came and they continued to grow as the message spread, "Look what is happening?" All kinds of people came. **"The tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him."** They came to rejoice in this message that brought hope for all.

But there were some who did not share in the joy. They came to see Jesus, but it was for a different reason. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were grumbling, **"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** They were offended that the "Messiah" would rather spend his time with these people than with them, the religious leaders who

spent all their time studying the words of Moses and the prophets. This just proved to them that they were right. If Jesus was the promised Savior, he wouldn't spend his time with these sinful people. "Jesus isn't who he says he is," they mumbled to each other, "If he were, certainly he would be spending all his time with us."

What caused the attitude in both of those stories? To a certain extent, those two little boys shared the same feeling as the Pharisees; they were upset that they weren't part of the celebration. They felt neglected. Their reaction to those feelings came out in an ugly way.

Now listen to one more story. There is a flock of 100 sheep that graze out in a plush field in the wilderness. This flock has it pretty good. They have everything they need to keep them alive and well. They can lay down in green pastures. They are led beside quiet waters. The flock is big enough so that they aren't an easy target for predators. There are a few good lead sheep that the rest of the flock follows. But despite all of that, one of the sheep somehow manages to get lost. Now, how would you feel about that sheep as a member of the flock? Would you scoff at that sheep's stupidity and carelessness? Would you be quick to judge that sheep for its wandering ways?

Now, even though there are 99 sheep that still need care and guidance, the shepherd decides to go after the lost sheep. It seems logical to him. He cares for this sheep. It is one of his own. It hurts him to think about what might happen if this sheep is left out in the wild on its own. His love for this one lost sheep takes him away from the flock. What would you think if your shepherd took off in search of this lost sheep? Would you be tempted to say, "It was his fault he wandered off from the flock, just leave him be?" Would you be angry that he was spending his time on this wild sheep chase, using his time, energy and resources on a search that could result in nothing? Would you feel unloved because you are left by yourself?

As the story continues, the shepherd is gone for a long time, but finally he returns and he is singing a happy tune. He has found the lost sheep and he comes into sight carrying it on his shoulders. He goes and shows his friends the lost sheep he has found. They all celebrate for the sheep and the successful search. It is a wonderful occasion.

Out with the flock, how do you feel as this is all going on? Do you join in the celebration for the sheep that has been found? Or do you get jealous that nobody is celebrating you? You are just in the field, diligently doing whatever sheep do, living life with no pomp or celebration. How do you feel as those sheep who aren't the center of attention? Like those immature children and self-righteous Pharisees, it is very easy to stay out of the celebration when you aren't the ones being celebrated, when you aren't the center of attention. It is even easier when you feel you are being neglected.

Now carry that over to the church. As members who are safely in the fold, do you ever feel like you are outside of the celebration? Do you ever feel neglected? Maybe it seems like the pastors and the church leaders are more focused on everyone else than they are on you. Maybe you don't get the warm welcome and smile when you walk into church that the new visitor always seems to receive. Because of that, maybe you don't feel the fire when you come into church as much as you used to. Maybe there isn't that excitement that there used to be. Maybe you don't share in all the joy whenever there is a baptism, confirmation or new person accepted into membership. Maybe you aren't all that keen on welcoming visitors or outreach events because it means another person that is newer than you and a bigger church to get lost in. As members who are already part of God's flock, how do you fight that feeling from coming into your life? How do you make sure that you are always happy to be a part of the celebration?

Remember that you were once lost. You were out on your own in a scary world with no place to go for shelter and no defense against the attacks of the devil. Remember how hopeless your situation was. Your sin had completely separated you from God and his flock. There was no way in this world that you were going to find your way to the safety of the flock.

But Christ found you. He saved you from the devil and he brought you safely into the protection of his church. Each one of you was at one time this lost sheep that Jesus carried on his back, rejoicing as he brought you into the fold. I'm sure that each one of your rescue stories is very different, but each one of those rescues ended with the same great celebration. And though that celebration may be

well in the past, you are still a part of the flock. Though every Sunday may not fill you with the same excitement that first filled you when you joined the church, take joy in what you have as a member of this flock. You have continually green pastures to feed you, which are the Word and Sacrament. You have a flock around you that keeps you safe, ready to thwart any of the attacks of your enemies. You have shepherds that keep watch over you, ready to help when you need it. You have Christ's promise that he is your Good Shepherd and he will always keep you under his watchful eye.

As members of the flock, take joy in what you have and support the search for the lost. Encourage your pastors to spend their time and energy and resources to search for the lost. Fill them with confidence that you support them in this difficult and sometimes frustrating task. Be understanding and patient when you might feel neglected. Be confident that you are never far from the Good Shepherd's care. Take advantage of the group of fellow Christians that Christ has surrounded you with. Take time to interact with your fellow sheep. Share the Word with one another whenever you can. Encourage your fellow members to come to midweek Bible classes that are offered at church. And never stop celebrating the lost that the Shepherd brings to join you in the flock. Rejoice when new members come into the church. Take joy in those Sundays when there is a baptism, confirmation or new member accepted into membership. Be eager to welcome back into God's flock members who have strayed from the flock and have come back into God's house. Reach out to new people whom you have never seen. Love the new sheep in the flock and let their joy renew your excitement.

Every lost soul which is found is a reason for us a church to celebrate! Every week which we remain in the flock is a reason to rejoice! Amen