

Sin and What To Do About It (Dinners For Sinners)

Luke 15

#16 in stories "Jesus Told Series"

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Prayer

Lord God, we thank you that you have sent your Word into this world of sorrow and that, Jesus, you are a man acquainted with grief and sorrow, for you are totally acquainted with us. And so Lord God, I pray that you would preach your gospel this morning into us and that we would trust that our Father is good. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Message

In our text for today, Jesus tells a story about ten valuable coins.

Our family has been collecting state quarters and the first ten issued in 1999 and 2000 are really valuable, so I brought these ten coins as an illustration. (One, two, three, four five, six, seven, eight, nine, . . . Hey, I'm missing a coin! [Peter begins to search for the coin] Oh, man, where is it? This coin really matters to me.

Vince: Hey, Peter, I found this quarter on the floor in the men's room."

Peter: Oh, thanks, Vince. This coin is so valuable to me.

Peter: [talking to coin] Massachusetts, I missed you!

You shouldn't have gotten lost.

It was wrong to be lost, and now I'm going to make that wrong right.

I'm so mad at you for being lost!

You're going to stay lost forever without end.

(Throws coin.)

Now I feel better. Justice is satisfied. Don't you hate it when things get lost?

Last August, we went hiking with Inga.



This is Inga.

(She's my son's dog, who has become the family dog.) Everyone loves Inga and Inga loves everyone. Well, we took Inga hiking in the wilderness just to the west of our home in Morrison. Everything was great, until Inga saw a squirrel and just took off after the squirrel. We looked for Inga all afternoon.

Around 5pm, we were yelling, "Inga, Inga, where are you?" Then all at once, she came bounding out of the trees slobbering on us, and wagging her tail. I exclaimed, "Oh, Inga, we were so worried about you! We hate it when you're lost. I'm so mad at you for being lost. You're going to stay lost forever without end."



She followed us back to the car, - but we wouldn't let her in.
She found her way back to the house the next day, - but we kept the door closed.
Just about every day, she shows up at the front door.
She's a bag of bones and coyotes or something have taken bites from her flesh. She whimpers and begs and I say to her,
"Inga, you made your choice."
"Justice requires that I honor your choice."
"You chose to be lost."
Don't you hate it when things get lost?



This is my daughter, Elizabeth, along about two years old. There are no words to describe how much I adored her. One afternoon, along about 1992, we went to a backyard party at the home of our church business manager, Rick Noling. I told Elizabeth, "Elizabeth, look at me. You need to stay with me and stay away from the pool." Well, everyone was having a great time - it was a great party. I was eating hors d'oeuvres, laughing and talking to someone when I just happened to hear a faint,

“kerplunk.” I turned and looked for Elizabeth, and she wasn’t there. Immediately, I scanned the party and realized she was lost. I looked in the pool and my heart stopped. I saw my treasure, my baby, my life, my daughter in the bottom of the deep end, six feet under, floating in silence – utterly alone. Without a thought, I dove into the pool – hors d’oeuvres, nice clothes, people, judgments and all – it didn’t matter; I dove in and found my daughter. I remember standing on the side of the pool holding Elizabeth so tightly against my chest, feeling her little heart beat next to mine. And, as everyone stopped and stared at us, I just started kissing her over, and over, and over again.



Then I stood her on the side of the pool and said, “Elizabeth, it was wrong of you to fall in the pool. Your punishment for getting lost in to be forever lost.” And I pushed her back in the pool.

Everyone at the party said, “Peter, it was right that you honored her choice and did what was just.”—*ekdikesis*.

To this day, each of my other three children (my living children) will say, “It’s good that Elizabeth was lost in the pool, for it makes me grateful that I was not; you are a loving and just father.”

Now, I need to confess, part of that story isn’t true. It is true, up until the part about pushing Elizabeth into the pool, and I made up the story about Inga. And I didn’t actually mean it when I was yelling at the coins. You already knew that because my three stories are fundamentally absurd.

I mean, can you even imagine a world like that?

A world in which people thought that was just.¹

I mean, can you even imagine a world in which people would think it just or right to punish the lost with endless lost-ness? That would be one messed up world – a world trapped in an immense and elaborate lie.

Well, my three stories are absurd, but maybe more than absurd.

¹ And remember what we’ve been learning: In Scripture, justice is not people getting what they deserve, for they deserve nothing. Justice is God getting what God deserves, and God deserves people in His image.

Maybe they're evil. And to think that way is evil – to think that way is to be profoundly lost.²

Luke 15: 1 – 2

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

That implies that Jesus actually hosted dinners for these people: tax collectors and sinners (which in Luke often implies prostitutes). Well, they were all *sinners*, or as Jesus refers to them: "the lost." And that's a fascinating way to put it. Well, as Frances put it in staff this week, Jesus hosted "dinners for sinners." And so, of course the Pharisees grumble, and that's understandable because sin hurts and God hates sin.

- Jesus even said, "*If your right hand causes you to sin, it would be better to cut it off than to be thrown into Gehenna, where the worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched.*" And He went on to teach that all wickedness doesn't come from the hands but from the heart – as if we need to rip out our own hearts.
- No one has taken sin more seriously than Jesus – the man that committed no sin.

Well, understandably, the religious folks are concerned about Jesus hosting "dinners for sinners." And they wonder: "Jesus . . . what are you going to do about sin?"

Luke 15: 1- 2

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So He told them this parable:

He actually tells three stories about four lost things: a lost coin, a lost sheep (like a lost dog) and two lost children.

Luke 15: 4 – 7

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, I tell

² Speaking as a father, I hope that if anyone ever suggested that I would do such a thing to one of my own children – you would defend my honor. I discipline my kids – sometimes severely, but not so that they'd be forever lost. I do it so they would be forever found.

you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous [dikaioi] persons who need no repentance.”

Are there ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance?³

And if a shepherd left ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness, wouldn't the ninety-nine be lost? They just wouldn't know they were lost because sheep normally just follow the tail of the sheep in front of them.⁴

Well, Jesus says, *“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need not repentance.”*

So, if God were to maximize joy in heaven:

- All would be lost, and all would be found:
- All would be humbled, and all would be exalted:
- All would be consigned to disobedience, and the Shepherd would have Mercy on all.⁵

But you can't experience the joy of being found until you admit to yourself: “I'm lost.”

Luke 15: 7 – 8

“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 coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?”

She doesn't stop until she finds it. Jesus came to *“seek and save the lost.”* Why do we think He'll stop before He finds them? Are they worth less than a coin?

Luke 15: 8 – 9

What woman . . . if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And 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.”

[The Greek word for lost is *apolesa*, from *apothum*, also translated into English Bibles as destroyed, but it obviously means lost.]

³ Isaiah 53: 6 *“All we like sheep have gone astray (lost), we have turned – every one – to his own way.”*

⁴ Maybe those Pharisees are lost. What shepherd would leave ninety-nine to find one? That's a fascinating question.

⁵ Romans 11: 32

Luke 15: 10- 11

*Just so, I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And he said, "There was a man who had two **sons**."*

Lost coin,
Lost sheep,
Lost sons.

And now something in you may be feeling a little excited about that.

And something else in you may be feeling a bit offended:

"Hey, I'm not a coin. I'm not a sheep. I'm not a little kid. That's an invalid analogy, Jesus."

1. A coin doesn't have a choice. It doesn't decide to be good. It just is good. It's valuable.
2. And a sheep doesn't have a choice, like a sinner has a choice. A dog or a sheep can choose to go right or left, but a dog or sheep can't choose "the good" in freedom the way a person can choose to love.

Well, can a person choose to love?

God is love and so real love is God.

So any good choice must be God's choice, but we seem to think we can make that choice.

We don't believe *that* choice makes us.

Something in us is offended.

Jesus seems to think repentance is not something we *do* in order to be found, but that *being* found is repentance. Repentance is "*metanoia*" in Greek. It means "changed mind," or "new mind." Jesus acts like that new mind is a gift. And so we can't find the Way. The Way must find us. By definition, to be lost is to be unable to find the way, so you can't "should yourself" into being found.⁶

In the story,

The coin doesn't find the woman.

The woman finds the coin.

The sheep doesn't find the shepherd.

The shepherd finds the sheep.

The sinner who repents is not finding the Way.

The Way is finding the sinner and creating the Saint.

⁶ "Afflicted is the way and few are those who find it." "I am . . . the way." Matthew 7:14

See? Jesus is saying,

It's like you religious folks think:
A coin creates its own value.
And a stray sheep offends his Shepherd.
You must think a person creates his own value,
And lost people offend Me – their Shepherd – their Savior.
You must think salvation is finding yourself.
You must think you create yourself.
And so you don't need a Creator.
And so you reject the Creator's Word
And so you reject your own creation.
How could anyone possibly be more lost than that?

Well, it's just as Paul writes in Ephesians, "*We're saved by grace through faith and this faith is not of ourselves it is the gift of God that none may boast.*" And if you're like me, you say, "Amen. *BUT* what about sin?"

You may have noticed we're about to enter an election year, and every candidate has a plan to do something about sin, and the plan is *not* "dinners for sinners!"

Don't make too much of this, but it seems to me there are tax collector sins and prostitute sins. As we learned from the last two parables in Luke 18, we're *all* tax collectors and prostitutes. But, if you're more a tax collector, you'll worry about the prostitutes. And if you're more of a prostitute, you'll worry about the tax collectors.

So there are some folks pretty worried about income inequality, and I must say I find the statistics genuinely alarming. But what do we do about it? Jesus said, "*If you have two coats, give to him who has none.*" So should we pass legislation about coats, or maybe increase taxes on Bill Gates and his coats?

One candidate advocates a flat tax because they did that in the Old Testament. But they also mandated Socialism in the Old Testament. Every fifty years, they were commanded to return all property to its original owner. That's forty-nine years of capitalism interspersed with one year of outrageous socialism, called Jubilee.

And I'm not sure I want to tax Bill Gates because supposedly he gives half his income to charity. But the more his income goes to the government, the more our government might go to war. And that's something else that concerns me. Jesus said, "*Live by the sword and you'll die by the sword.*" Yet Paul seems to teach that God grants the sword to "*principalities and powers*" for the common good. And yet, we battle "*principalities and powers*" according to Paul, and wasn't it them –that crucified our Lord?

So what should we as a society, do about the tax collectors? I don't know. And what should we do about the prostitutes? I'm not sure. About sexual promiscuity, I'm not sure. But I do think no one ever had higher vision of sexual fidelity than Jesus, but not because He hated sex, but because He made sex and instituted marriage. What should

we do about the gay marriage amendment? Well, why did we think a bunch of senators with trophy wives could legislate marriage? Why did we think that in the first place?

And what about abortion? I'm rather horrified by abortion. And I preached about it plenty in the past, but struggle to talk about it now. I'm not so concerned for the babies. I believe Jesus has the babies. I'm concerned for the mothers. And not that God the Father is angry with them, but that they have such a hard time believing He loves them.

So what should we do and how should we vote? Some studies indicate that abortion rates are highest in countries that have some of the strictest laws against abortion [Carter – our Endangered values p. 74], and lowest in countries that provide the best health care. And yet many people get their morals from their government. So, exactly what should you do? I really don't know. I really don't know, but I know you want me to know. In fact, I think that's the very reason most folks go to church. We want the pastor to give us some more "knowledge of good and evil" so we can enact some more legislation and enforce more compliance through a system of rewards and punishment – that is lust and fear.

And now listen: That's what the government should do. And that's what we probably could do by sticking to certain verses in the Old Testament or a book like the Koran.⁷ Well, I don't know what we, as an institution should do, but I see a bit of what Jesus does do . . . And it's strange. Jesus is strange. And His attitude toward sin is definitely strange.

The Strange Attitude of Jesus Regarding Sin:

No one had a greater interest in destroying sin than Jesus. And no one had a greater love for sinners. That's strange—the Biblical word for strange is holy.

Check this out:

⁷ And I'm not saying that there aren't times when the pastor should say things like "Don't vote for Hitler."

The Strange Attitude of Jesus Regarding Sin:

- Jesus felt sorrow for sinners.
We're usually jealous of sinners.

Jesus felt sorrow for sinners. I think we're mostly jealous of sinners. He said, *"My food is to do the will of my Father."* So, for Jesus, not sinning was like eating pizza, and sinning was like a starvation diet. It was like eating dirt.

When my son, Coleman, was little, he used to eat dirt. I'd catch him in the back yard with dirt caked all around his little chubby cheeks.

I'd say, "Coleman, have you been eating dirt?"

He'd say, "No, daddy, I didn't eat any dirt."

I'd say, "Coleman, if you don't stop eating dirt, I'm going to make you eat dirt."

All sin is like eating dirt.

The Strange Attitude of Jesus Regarding Sin:

- Jesus felt sorrow for sinners.
We're usually jealous of sinners.
- Jesus saw sin as it's own punishment.
We consider it to be the reward.

Jesus saw sin as its own punishment.

We see sin as our reward, so we say stuff like: "Don't be greedy and God will reward you with streets of gold." "Forgive your enemies . . . so God will reward you and torture them."

But Jesus saw sin as it's own punishment. So once you see your sin – there is no need to be punished for your sin. Sin is a lack of faith in love, which renders a person totally alone. Sin is the deepest hell.

Julian of Norwich wrote: "And I was shown no harder hell than sin, because for a well-intentioned soul, there is no hell but sin."

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We're usually jealous of sinners.
- Jesus saw sin as it's own punishment.
We consider it to be the reward.
- Jesus came to save us from our sins.
We want to be saved so we can sin.

Jesus came to save us from our sins, but we act like He saves us so we *could* sin.
Sin is being trapped in the self and we think salvation is saving our self, finding our self – all about our lonely self.

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We want to be saved so we can sin.
- Jesus thought sin was bondage.
We talk as if it's freedom.

Jesus saw sin as bondage, and we describe it as freedom.

I don't know quite how to say this:

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- Jesus came to save us from our sins.
We want to be saved so we can sin.
- Jesus thought sin was bondage.
We talk as if it's freedom.
- Jesus didn't "blame" sinners for sin.
We think it can't be sin unless we can "blame" the sinner for the sin.

But Jesus didn't seem to blame sinners for sin, and we think it's not sin unless we can blame the sinner for the sin.

Now, don't get me wrong, I think Jesus would say that all sinners choose sin. We chose sin, and yet, we couldn't have chosen *not* to sin. Actually, with Jesus, it's like folks are chosen to choose sin, like sin is part of the plan, and it's always been part of the plan. Judas was chosen, and all that sin against Jesus was the plan from the foundation of the world. Dang! Just look at His stories: If anyone's to blame for a lost coin, it's not the coin, but the woman. It's not the sheep, but the Shepherd.

John 12: 39 quoting Isaiah, it reads:

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn and I would heal them."

Jesus quotes that line from Isaiah to explain sin in all the gospel accounts.

Jesus doesn't blame us for sin.

He treats it like a disease, a disease of the mind, so sinners can't see The Way.

He treats it like a disease of the heart, so they can't choose The Way.

He cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He didn't blame us, and it was all according to plan.

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- Jesus came to save us from our sins.
We want to be saved so we can sin.
- Jesus thought sin was bondage.
We talk as if it's freedom.
- Jesus didn't "blame" sinners for sin.
We think it can't be sin unless we can "blame" the sinner for the sin.
- Jesus hates sin and is attracted to sinners.
We're repulsed by sinners and attracted to sin.

Jesus hates sin, but is attracted to sinners.

We're repulsed by sinners, but attracted to sin.

Jesus is attracted to sinners and it seems like He's attracted in the very place of their sin.

I mean He wants us to confess our sin, not hide our sin.

"Sin" is the Greek word *hamortia*. It's not something you do as much as something you fail to do. So God didn't create sin. Sin is the absence of His creation. He doesn't make us sin- but He consigns us to sin. *Hamortia* in classical Greek is "*missing the mark*" or a "*failure to reach the goal*." And pay attention: Jesus is the goal.

Sin is an absence of truth and Jesus is the Truth.

Sin is an absence of Love and Jesus is Love given to you.

Sin is an absence of the Good and God alone is Good.

Jesus is God in flesh, Truth in Love – hanging on a tree, in a garden, Emmanuel – God with us.

So Jesus is attracted to an absence of Himself in you.

Jesus is attracted to sinners, like a groom attracted to his bride.

And sinners (sinners who know they're sinners are attracted to Jesus.

Jesus is attractive to them.

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We're usually jealous of sinners.
- Jesus saw sin as it's own punishment.
We consider it to be the reward.
- Jesus came to save us from our sins.
We want to be saved so we can sin.
- Jesus thought sin was bondage.
We talk as if it's freedom.
- Jesus didn't "blame" sinners for sin.
We think it can't be sin unless we can "blame" the sinner for the sin.
- Jesus hates sin and is attracted to sinners.
We're repulsed by sinners and attracted to sin.
- Jesus is attractive to sinners... who know that they've sinned.

Have you ever pondered that?

It's amazing that Jesus hosted banquets for sinners.

It's even more amazing that they wanted to come! They knew He hated sin, yet His eyes would dilate when He saw them, the sinners, "*He came to call sinners.*"

So what did Jesus do about sin? Well, it appears that He hosted "Dinners for Sinners."

Last week, someone sent me a fascinating little video about addiction. The biblical term for "addict" is sinner, that's someone enslaved to sin.

Addiction Experiment Clip

(Throughout the narration of this video, cartoon characters portray what is being said)

Narrator: Our current theory of addiction comes in part from a series of experiments that were carried out earlier in the twentieth century. The experiment is simple: You take a rat and put it in a cage with two water bottles. One is just water, the other is water laced with heroin or cocaine.

Almost every time you run this experiment, the rat will become obsessed with the drugged water, and keep coming back for more, and more, until it kills itself. But in the 1970's, Bruce Alexander, a professor of Psychology, noted something odd about this experiment, the rat is put in the cage all alone. It has nothing to do but take the drugs. What would happen, he wondered, if we tried this differently? So he built Rat Park, which is basically heaven, for rats.

Addiction Experiment Clip continued...

It's a lush cage where the rats would have colored balls, tunnels to scamper down, plenty of friends to play with, and, they could have loads of sex— everything a “rat about town” could want. And they would have the drugged water, and the normal water bottles. But here's the fascinating thing: In Rat Park, rats hardly ever used the drugged water. None of them ever use it compulsively. None of them ever overdose. But maybe this is a quirk of rats, right?

Well, helpfully, there was a human experiment along the same lines—the Vietnam War. Twenty percent of American troops in Vietnam were using a lot of heroin. People at home were really panicked because they thought there would be hundreds of thousands of junkies on the streets of the United States when the war was over. But, a study followed the soldiers home, and found something striking! They didn't go to rehab. They didn't even go into withdrawal. Ninety-five percent of them just stopped – after they got home.

Human beings have an innate need to bond and connect. When we are happy and healthy, we will bond with the people around us. But when we can't, because we're traumatized isolated, or beaten down by life, we will bond with something that gives us some sense of relief. It might be endlessly checking a smart-phone. It might be pornography, video games, wedges, gambling or, it might be cocaine. But, we will bond with something, because that is our human nature. The path out of the unhealthy bonds is to form healthy bonds.

“We will bond with something, because that is our nature.” What a concept! Well, rats are put in a cage. But sinners are born sinners and construct their own cage.

As we noted last time, there was a time before you had “the knowledge of good and evil,” but it appears that you were born with sin. In Romans 7, Paul talks as if he was born with sin, but he didn't know sin until he learned the law and sin “came to life” and he became addicted to sin and trapped in himself.

In the garden, Adam had sin, but didn't know it was sin until He took fruit from the tree of the “knowledge of good and sin.” But, before he took that fruit, Adam (which means mankind) Adam was alone and God said, “It's not good for Adam to be alone” – disconnected, that's sin. Adam couldn't find his helper, and yet he was standing right next to his helper.

Think about that. Adam was alone in the presence of God (three persons – one substance) God is love, the ultimate party. Adam was like a rat in rat heaven, unable to enjoy rat heaven.

Adam was with the Good, but couldn't choose the Good, for he didn't know the Good, God is the Good!

Adam needed help, but couldn't trust his Helper. *Jesus* means, “*God is Help.*” – “*God is salvation.*” It was like the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. God was his and all He had was his, but he couldn't trust God, for he hadn't seen God's heart. Sin is a lack of faith in love, and Jesus is the Word of Love from the bosom of the Father, broken and bleeding and hanging on a tree in a garden. Jesus is the Good.

Pharisees wanted to use the Good. The sinners were drawn to the good because they were beginning to love the Good, and that's good: *"When I am lifted up, I will draw . . ."*

I don't know what the US government should do about sin, but Jesus reveals what God *does* do about sin. The Pharisees grumble that Jesus hosts "dinners for sinners" and Jesus tells about:

A woman that finds a lost coin,
A shepherd that finds a lost sheep
And a Father that finds a lost boy.

And this is how He finds him: (We'll preach on this next week, but we'll read it now.)
Lost sheep, lost coin, next verse:

Luke 15: 11 – 12

And Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property

Ousia – "the substance." It's a huge word in theology, for the early church declared Jesus was of the same ousia as His Father.)

"Father give me the share of the ousias that is coming to me." And he divided his

Bion – it means "life" or livelihood. It's where we get our word biology.

He divided his life between them.

In that culture, this request was an unheard of evil. The son was saying, "I wish you were dead, and I want your stuff. " It's sin. And this is what the Father does: He lets him sin. He lets both boys sin. He divides His substance between them and gives them His life.

But don't think the Father is ignoring their sin.
Grace has nothing to do with ignoring sin.
Grace reveals sin.

Do you realize that every time you commit sin, you break God's substance and take God's Life?

Sin hurts you, hurts others, and mostly hurts God. And this is the first thing God does about it: He lets you commit it, even arranges for you to do so.

It was no accident that the tree was placed in the middle of the Garden, and Eve bumped into an evil talking snake.

In the Revelation, after all that drama, the dragon, the beast the lake of fire, after we all cry out, so what should we do about sin?

Last chapter of the last book in the Bible, Jesus says:

"Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy."

He says, “*Let them sin.*”

Isn't that a bit shocking? And yet, He'll let you sin this very day. You already have sin, and every day He lets you commit sin. He must hope you'll get sick of sin.

Recently, a friend shared a vision with me. She saw herself sitting on the bottom of a swimming pool holding her breath. Jesus sat on the diving board swinging his legs, laughing, and waiting for her to come up.

Sin is our own will. And Jesus came to save us from our will.
So He allows us to exercise our will until we're sick of our will and want to join His party.
He lets us be lost, so we'll want to be found.
You can't enjoy being found until you realize you're lost.

Well, the Father divides His *bion* between them.

Luke 15: 13 – 17

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself . . .”

(Now let me ask you, according to Jesus, is salvation “finding yourself,” or “losing yourself?”)

Luke 15: 17-19

But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son . . .”

If this boy thought he could make himself worthy of being a son, he doesn't understand what it is to be a son, or see the heart of the Father.

Luke 15: 18b – 19 (ESV)

“‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”

See, he wants to earn his Father's stuff.
He doesn't want to be a son, he wants to be an employee.
He doesn't want his Father, he wants his Father's stuff.
He doesn't love his Father, he only uses his Father.
He's come to himself, and is trapped in himself. He's still lost. Never more lost.

Luke 15: 20

“And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

He embraced him, like I embraced Elizabeth on the side of the pool.
And the Greek implies that he kissed his son and would not stop kissing his son, all before the son could say anything, promise anything, or do anything.

Luke 15: 21

“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

Period. Jesus is the master storyteller. The son repeats his speech, but leaves out the last line. He doesn’t want to say it, or the Father interrupts him before he can say it. The Father doesn’t want an employee. He wants a son!

Luke 15: 21 – 24

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate.

The boy no longer wants to be an employee.
He wants to be a son.
He’s lost his old will and has a new will.
He has a new mind and a new heart, and it was his Father’s kindness that “*led him to repentance.*”

Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us, finding us, out on the road.

So what does God do about sin?

1. He lets us sin,
2. And, at the right time, He ambushes us with Grace.
3. And that creates Faith.
4. And we’re justified by faith – made right in the image of God and God does not sin.

So what should we do about sin?

1. Well, we should be honest about sin.
2. But we must allow people to sin. And suffer their sins.
3. And, when possible, host a few “dinner for sinners.”

You may be saying, “Nice thought preacher boy, but if you live that way, you’ll get yourself crucified that way.” Yep.

The Prodigal son enjoys “dinners for sinners.”
But his older brother does not.

Luke 15:25

“Now his older son was in the field . . . “

(We’ll read his story next week.)

He comes to the party, and he leaves the party and stands in outer darkness.
He’s angry that his Father allowed his little brother to sin. Yet, this boy knows nothing but sin.
He believes he’s worthy to be a son.

And that’s why the party burns his pride, his ego, his prison, himself, his sin. That’s why he hates the lost and wants them to stay lost. But he is most lost. He stands in the outer darkness and the Father comes, stands with him and says to him, *“You are always with me and all that’s mine is yours.”* What a statement!

He lets him sin and He ambushes him with Grace, and that’s where the story ends...at least, in Luke 15.

Jesus said, *“Many will come from east and west, and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness . . .”* Who throws them there? It seems that they throw themselves into outer darkness.

Well, it’s because of Jesus’, “dinners for sinners” that the Pharisees get so angry that they take His Life on the tree in the garden and cast themselves into outer darkness. Yet, on that tree in the garden, God the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord descends into outer darkness and every dark field. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us out on the road, and come to find us in the darkest field.

Communion

On that night before He was crucified, He took bread and broke it – divided it –saying, *“This is my body given to you.”* And He took the cup saying, *“This is the covenant in my blood.”*

This is dinner for the sinner.
And look, we’re sinners.
He has divided His *ousian* – (His *substance*) - between us.
And He has given us His Life.

What should we do about sin?

1. Confess it.
2. Allow God our Father to ambush us with Grace.

This “dinner for the sinner” destroys our old will and gives us a new will.
And that’s God’s will.
And God’s will is free!

Benediction

So close your eyes, and I want you to think of a sin, preferably a sin that you’ve repeated several times—preferably one that makes you want to hide, that makes you feel embarrassed; you don’t want anybody in this room to know about it. I want you to think of yourself sinning that sin. Got it? Now I want to tell you something: God is watching you. What is His attitude towards you at this moment? Now there’s a lie. There’s a lie that’s been spoken into humanity about His attitude, and there’s the truth. Jesus said, *“Call Him Dad.”*

Now, for some of you, that terrifies you. For some of you, you just got a glimmer of hope. He’s a good Dad. Does He love you less right now? No! How did I feel when I saw Elizabeth at the bottom of the pool? And I had told her not to go close to the pool! She saw something in the pool, probably wanted to play with a ball or something. Well, how did I feel toward her? How does God feel towards you? Does He love you less? No. If anything, He loves you more!

And, you see, if you’re a dad, if you’re a mom, you’ve felt that feeling, haven’t you? And how does Jesus feel towards you? Well, let me tell you: His Love burns, for you.

Do you trust Him?
Can you understand that?
Are you terrified of that or, if you trust that, do you invite that?
Will you let Him love you in this place?
Because He longs to love you in this place, and give you life.

If you let Him love you, and He’s the One that even gives you the ability for that to happen. If you let Him love you, well you know what? You will know what to do when the crowd throws a prostitute at your feet. You will know what to do, when you stumble upon a tax collector at the side of a crowd, who nobody wants to talk to. You will know what to do when a Pharisee comes to you in the middle of the night with a world of guilt on his shoulders eating away at his heart. And you will know what to say to the crowd. You will know when it’s time to preach an angry sermon about “woe upon you.” And you will know when it’s time to make a whip of cords and drive them out of the temple.

And you’ll know when it’s time to let them pound the nails.
You will love, - because God has loved – you.

And so, by way of benediction, I’m just saying, believe the Gospel, and host some “dinners for sinners.”

In Jesus’ name, Amen.