

Party Penance

Luke 15

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Message

I don't know exactly how to tell you this, but Friday night I was down on East Colfax for the "Save our City" pastors' coalition meeting for ethical living. I was walking back to my car, around 10 pm, when I noticed a motel window; the curtains were drawn, I could hear loud pounding music. In the window, I saw some women dancing. From their apparel it was obvious what their profession was; they were prostitutes. They were dancing with some middle aged ugly men. The cars parked outside the motel had "Internal Revenue Service" printed on the doors. They were tax collectors. I was about to leave in total disgust when all at once I saw a familiar face. It was Andrew Tibert, who was ordained just two weeks ago, and He wasn't preaching. He had a beer in one hand and cake in the other, and He was laughing and dancing around the room.

I was standing out in this dark field next to the motel. There was no way I was going in. So I just started screaming, "Tibert, Andrew Tibert!" until at last, he came out. I said, "You better explain yourself, but he couldn't. He just told me some stories, something about a sheep, a coin, and some boys. And then he said, "Why don't you come in?" and I said, "Why don't you repent?"

[Peter then shows a clip of monks walking in a row. They are all clothed in dark clothes, singing dreary music in Latin, and banging their heads with wooden boards.]

That's what we need, some penance and some word of God. Let's pray.

Prayer

Lord God, we ask that you would help us to preach in Jesus' name. Help us to preach, to believe, and to be what you want us to be.

Luke 15:1-3

Now the tax collectors and sinners...

(That's probably a reference to prostitutes.) And it says "sinners," it doesn't say "former sinners"

...were drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes

(That's a reference to the "pastors coalition")

grumbled, saying, "This man receives ("accepts" or "welcomes") sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable, (this story):

Actually, he told them three stories about a sheep, a coin, and two boys.

And now, I should mention that I'm lying about Andrew, but Luke is not lying about Jesus. From Luke, it appears that Jesus not only welcomed tax collectors and sinners but actually hosted parties for tax collectors and sinners, and in that day when you invited someone to your house for a meal, they were an honored guest that you invited into a sanctuary of a communal meal; it really meant something.

Tax collectors (having sold out to the Romans) and prostitutes turned people into property; that's mammon; that's sin. Yet, just before this incident in Luke 14, Jesus said, "When you throw a party, do it for those that can't repay you." That makes some sense because people that think they can pay are proud, and pride is what wrecks the party.

Well, the pastors protest, and Jesus tells three stories about four things that are lost.

Luke 15:4-7

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave ninety-nine in the open country 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 you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need repentance.

Now that's an utterly amazing statement: Are there ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance? Isaiah 53:6a *"All we like sheep have gone astray, everyone turned to his own way."*

Is there even one righteous person who needs no repentance? Yes, Isaiah 53:6b: *"And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* Well, ok...other than Jesus, was there ever a man or a woman that needed no repentance? Well, yes, for a time, before they took knowledge of the good from the tree, Adam and Eve needed no repentance, and maybe babies need no repentance. Yet, there's more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need no repentance.

If God were aiming for maximum joy in Heaven, how would He see it accomplished? Well, wouldn't He allow all to be lost? And then make sure that all lost are found? Wouldn't He *"consign all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all,"* just as scripture says? So that *"as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive"* (Just as scripture says)? Luke 19 Jesus says, *"I came to seek and save the lost,"* and Jesus said, *"Won't the shepherd search for the one that is lost until he finds it?"* (The lost *apololos* is also translated the "perished," the "destroyed." Won't the shepherd search for the destroyed one until He finds the destroyed one? Wow!

And get this! In Luke 17:33, Jesus says, *"whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and he who loses his life will save it."* So you have to get lost...to be found, and being found is what fuels the party, which is Heaven. So if you hate the idea of people getting found, or the idea that you might be lost, well then, you hate heaven, and you are lost. It's a good thing that Jesus came *"to seek and save the lost."*

Sometimes, when I say, "I think all the lost will be found," people will reply: "Then what's the point of Jesus?" I think to myself: "They must believe the ancient lie that we must find *ourselves* rather than *be found* by Jesus. They're lost. They don't know that Jesus and His cross are the way that the lost are found.

I was a lifeguard in high school one summer, and I found every lost person in the pool. I saved every person that might've been drowning. Each time there was a party. And at the end of summer, no one said, "Well, what's the point of a lifeguard if he saves all? He should've let half of the people drown so the half that he saved could really be grateful. And he should've saved only those that really wanted to be saved, and so, partially saved themselves and thus deserved to be saved. What's the point of a Savior who saved all...what's the point?" Well...Jesus says, joy: *"There will be more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who need no repentance."*

Luke 15:8-10

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? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with them, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Well now, maybe this is our problem: Jesus equates repentance with being found. So, repentance is not a thing we do in order to get found; repentance is a what getting found looks like...

as if getting found causes us to repent
as if you can't be proud of repenting or it's not repentance, and you're not found.

Well, the pastors' coalition must think that unless you decide to repent you're not worth being found. But you see, a coin doesn't decide to be found, and yet we throw a party when it is. And that's because a coin has intrinsic amoral value. A sheep has intrinsic amoral value. The shepherd doesn't think, "Gosh, I wonder if the lost sheep really wants to be found, because if it doesn't really want to be found, I certainly wouldn't violate its freedom."

News Flash: If you're lost, you're not free!

Why do we American Christians keep saying: "God won't violate our freedom?"

According to scripture, we don't have any freedom!

No freedom until we're found.

No real freedom, until lost...then found.

Maybe God is creating freedom...and we don't know....until we're lost...then found.

Well, Jesus tells a story about...

A lost sheep and a party that's thrown,

A lost coin and a party that's thrown,

And now, a lost boy, actually two lost boys.

Luke 15:11-12

And he 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 ("ousias") that is coming to me." and he divided his property ("bios") between them.

In that culture, this request was unimaginably evil. This prodigal boy has turned his father into mammon, but not just the younger boy, also the older, for the older doesn't stop the younger. And the father divides his goods between them. He divides his *ousias*; this word means "substance-beingness;" it's the feminine form of I AMness, and it can mean "goods." And his *bios*, we derive our word "biology" from this word. He divides his *ousias* and his *bios*; He divides His life between them.



The prodigal is saying, "Father I want my inheritance; I wish you were dead. I want your goods, and I don't want you." It's exactly what this world was saying when we took Jesus' life on the tree. It's exactly what Adam and Eve were doing when they took knowledge of the good on the tree: "I want, we want your substance and your life," and amazingly, right here at the start of the story, the Father freely agreed, and He gave His life.

Revelation 13:8 says, Jesus was: “*slain from the foundation of the earth.*” That’s the very start of the story. So you see, everything is Grace and always has been Grace. We just don’t know it because we’re lost.

Luke 15:12-20

*And he divided his (bios) between them. 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 (That’s a pretty bad fate for a Jew). 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**...*

He came to himself..but...what if his self is lost? You can’t repent of yourself with yourself.
He found himself..but what if his self is the problem?

he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish (am lost) 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. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” And he arose and came to his father.

Why? Because he’s hungry and he wants to be an employee.

An employee receives nothing by grace; he earns his wage and can be proud that he does.

An employee wants the boss’s stuff, but not the boss.

An employee works the system, like the older brother works the system.

He “honors” the boss with his lips, “*though his heart is far from him.*”

This boy is still lost, never more so.

He doesn’t want to be a son, and he doesn’t want to be found.

He’s “found” himself; he’s “saving” himself.

He practices his lines ending with: “Treat me as one of you hired servants.”

It looks like repentance, but it is a whitewashed tomb.

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.

The Greek implies he: “kissed him over and over and over.”

For the father to come down and run to this wicked boy, past a crowd of people ready to revile him for his crimes, and fall on him with kisses at the edge of the city...well, it just shows incredible humility on the part of this father. And it all happens before the boy can say a thing or do a thing. It all happens before the boy repents or can even fathom repentance. The father throws a party, a banquet of grace, out on the road, just like the shepherd rejoiced over the sheep in the wilderness...*before* he carried the sheep home to the party. Just like Jesus rejoiced over tax collectors and sinners...*before* they were baptized and joined the church choir.

The father partied before the boy could even fake his repentance.

You don’t have to wait for sinners to repent before you throw them a party.
Maybe they can’t repent until you do.

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."

He gives his speech but leaves out the last line. That's huge in a parable, because parables are highly structured. You can invert it and see what's missing. In a culture that tells stories everyone would know that. He leaves out the last line. He no longer asks to be an employee; he just says, "I'm not worthy." It's like the love of the father has burned the Hell right out of him. He says, "I'm not worthy." He "dies:" his pride dies; his ego dies; he repents. It's "*his kindness* (the Father's kindness) *that leads to repentance*," writes Paul. "I'm not worthy to be called son," says the boy.

If you think you must make yourself worthy to be a son, you don't know what it is to be a son. A son is worthy to be a son because he doesn't deserve to be a son. A son is a son by virtue of being a baby. If you won't admit that you don't deserve to be a son, you can't live like a son. If you won't admit you're lost, you'll never enjoy being found; even if you're surrounded by heaven, your heart will be lost in Hell.

Well, this demonstration of grace, this party on the road, given by the father, reveals that the boy is lost. The party judges his heart and calls him home to his father. Mammon is *not* this boy's inheritance. His *father* is his inheritance. Now he doesn't care about his father's goods. His father *is* the good. He wants his father, his *living* father. Both father and son were dead, and now they're alive. They party!

Luke 15:22-24

*But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him,
That would be his robe, the father's robe.*

*The Pharisees knew the robe was a robe of righteousness.
and put a ring on his hand...*

*This was likely a signet ring symbolizing identity and authority.
and shoes on his feet..."*

Shoes mean freedom. He hadn't been free, and now he was free.

He obtained righteousness, authority, and freedom, and he paid for it all with
NOTHING! The cost was nothing, and now he knew it; it's all Grace.

The father says, "And bring the fatted calf and kill it."

Killing the fattened calf meant the entire village would party, like Heaven parties over one sinner who repents.

"Bring the fatted calf...and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again (It's like he's "born again"!) he was dead and is alive again: he was lost, and is found."

And they began to celebrate. They began to party, and that's repentance.

A sheep, a coin, and now a boy.

Once again, something's lost, sought after, then found, and then a party.

Jesus is saying, "You rejoice at lost sheep and lost coins, why not lost boys and lost girls?

Why not tax collectors and prostitutes? Why not rejoice at them? Well, we say lost sheep and lost coins have intrinsic amoral value. They don't have to decide to be good; they just are good. Well, what about lost boys? The answer may change depending on whom you ask.

You know, most of our relationships are based on the record of a person's decisions...most...except for the relationship between a parent and a child. So, ask a father, and you'll get a rather different answer than the one given by the chairman of the "Save or City" pastors' council on ethical living.

A father meets his son when the son is a baby, and babies have no resume and can't make an ethical decision. They're "good for nothing," just good, and a father sees it. In my diary, after Elizabeth was born, I wrote: "She's kinda like a Jesus in a tortilla sort of miracle. I don't know what she's good for, but she's just good, a breath of God and just a little clay." She was a person with no resume and yet worth the greatest of all parties.

By the time Coleman, my youngest son, our fourth child, was born, we'd gotten the hang of things, and we were ready with a party. We had a party just because Coleman had turned zero. He had zero references on his resume, zero dollars in the bank and in his entire life he had made zero ethical decisions...zero. He had accomplished ZERO, but he was worth everything, and so we had a party. We had a cake for him just like we did for Susan. He was born on her 34th birthday.

Clip from *Hiatt Home Movies*

[A hospital room is filled with friends and family singing "Happy Birthday to You" to Coleman. Coleman's sister and brother are standing in front of a birthday cake with candles and wearing hats. Then we are shown Jonathan, Coleman's older brother holding Coleman.]

Peter: *What are you going to teach him?*

Jonathon: *I'm going to teach him how to play cars and ride bikes...and...*

That was Jonathan. Jonathan is Coleman's older brother, and I wanted him to hold his younger brother and party, because I anticipated that one day Coleman might walk up to Jonathan and hit Jon with a toy car, and Jonathan might forget that even if Coleman is "good for nothing," he's just good.

Henri Nouwen wrote: "We should make a bigger deal out of birthdays because they just celebrate a person's existence."

I used to kneel beside each of my children as they slept, put my face next to those chubby little cheeks and think: "I'll love you forever; I'll like you for always; as long as I'm living my baby you'll be." I celebrated the sheer wonder of their existence, and then I'd think: "How could I ever not love you?"

Well...that was eighteen years ago, in Coleman's case, twenty-four years ago in Jonathan's case. Now those pudgy little cheeks have whiskers. They don't smell like baby powder anymore; they smell like "man." And each has acquired an impressive resume of successes and failures. It's easy to lose sight of the baby; for it's covered in "employee." It's easy to lose sight of the miracle, because it's covered in "resume." And yet, there are these moments, bitter sweet moments when they come walking down the road from the far country, stripped of their resumes and stripped of accomplishments. There are moments the world has turned them zero, moments when they've failed or think they've failed. Bitter because it hurts, but sweet because I see them, and they can see that I see them and that I love them...just them, and then their ego dies, but they live; we live; we party. ,

You see...I can only exhibit the depths of my love when they're stripped of the idea that they've earned that love. They can only receive the depths of my love when they're stripped of the idea that they've earned that love.

If you feel utterly undeserving of God's love, rejoice; for at last you're ready to receive God's love. Unless you know that you're lost, you can't truly be found, and getting found is a party called heaven.

Actually, I think I may enjoy my kids now even more than before, because they've been lost and found, lost and found, lost and found. And maybe they can enjoy me more because I've sought after them with everything; I have lost and found them. I mean, we lost one at Disney Land, one at Elitch's. We lost Coleman at the Safeway in California. We've lost them in sickness and in sin. And I'm going to enjoy them even more because wherever they're still lost they will be found and we will party in the "eternal habitations." We took Coleman to CU this week for his first week of college.



And so everyone is inspecting his resume to determine his value. But I know his value; he has intrinsic amoral value. No more and no less than the day he was born, but getting lost and found, lost and found, lost and found will reveal that eternal value to him and to the entire universe.

That boy is worth the body and blood of his Father in Heaven. Because I'm his earthly father, I get to see it even now. When I look at Coleman, I see that baby boy, and I know he's always worth a party, worth the party just because he exists.

Many years ago when we lived in LA, Susan was driving home from work when she was stopped by a terrible accident. A man had been thrown from a car and his body was lying in the street. Police were directing traffic, and the commuters were impatient. People were yelling and honking their horns. Susan suddenly saw this woman jump out of her car and run to the body in the middle of the road. She bent down and covered the body with her coat. Then she stood up, turned around and started screaming at all the angry commuters: "He was somebody's baby! He was somebody's baby!"

That changes things doesn't it?

What if tax collectors and prostitutes are somebody's baby?

What if every Al Qaeda terrorist is somebody's baby?

What if the person you hate most is somebody's baby?

What if everyone that's lost is worth being found, because they're somebody's baby?

What if they're God's baby?

What if God threw a party for them...for your worst enemy? Would you want to go?

And what if the party's called heaven?

Well, if you don't want to go...you're lost.

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. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

"Sons of the kingdom...thrown into outer darkness..." SONS.

Well, who throws them into this outer darkness?

Maybe they throw themselves into outer darkness.

Luke 15:25-28

Now his older son (the father's older boy) was in the field, and as he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound." But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.

The father saw him while he was still a long way off, and felt compassion for him, and humbled himself before all the guests, and descended into that field (where his boy, his baby wept and gnashed his teeth) and there, in that place, he showered him with a banquet of Grace.

His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, "Look these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command."

He says, "...never disobeyed your command," and yet even now he's crucifying his father's heart.

"...never disobeyed the command," and yet he never *knew* the command.

The commandment is Love.

"...never disobeyed the command," and yet he hated his father and he used his father, just like a man uses a harlot.

He's doing the very thing that he accused his brother of doing to women in the far country; that's what this boy was doing to his father in his father's house. Just as Israel had been doing for one thousand years. Just as the children of Adam had been doing since that tree in the garden. That's what he was doing, and he couldn't even see it.

He is LOST.

He is alone in utter darkness, and yet, he's standing in the very presence of Love.

God is Love and God is the party.

Three persons, one substance called Love.

That's a party.

The party has descended into his darkness.

Luke 15: 29-32

I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might party with my friends. But when this son of yours (not my brother, so you're not my father)...when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" (You sacrificed for him!) And the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

And that's where the story stops...exactly where these scribes and Pharisees are...sons of the kingdom gnashing their teeth in outer darkness...but the Father is with them; He's entreating them. Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." They see but don't see. They want the goods but don't know the good. And so they hang the Good on a tree in a field, at the edge of the city. They take His life, but He gives His life. And He is the Life...of the party. But now in space and time they're lost; they are lost sons.

Maybe all are lost sons and lost daughters so...

Maybe no one deserves a party, but all are worthy of a party, so...

Maybe the older brother is worth just as much as the younger brother.

He said, "Father you killed the fatted calf for him."

Do you think the father killed the fatted calf only for him...or for both of them?

Well, we know the party is judgment for with the party one son is found and with the same party the other son is further lost.

Perhaps he's further lost, so his father can seek the lost and he too can be found?

He's lost in himself, for he won't lose himself. He's lost in his own arrogance and pride, and pride wrecks the party.

You have to turn zero to be born again.

You have to turn zero to enjoy the party.

You have to turn zero to enter the kingdom.

This son is lost because he hasn't lost himself. Maybe he'll get sick of himself in the outer darkness, and maybe he'll see the light shining in the darkness...and on *his* darkness, and want to lose himself—want to join the party.

Well, one son is in the party and one son is outside of the party. So, the party is judgment. The Father doesn't judge, but the party he throws is judgment. And the Father bears that judgment. I mean...if his boy chooses hell, the father chooses to be with him. If his son stands in outer darkness, the father chooses to stand with him.

See? The father can't truly enjoy the party if even *one* of his sons is lost in darkness.

Origen, perhaps the most renowned of all the church fathers wrote, "Christ remains on the cross as long as one sinner remains in Hell."

As if He came to seek and to save the lost.

As if He won't stop until every lost sheep is found.

As if He bore our sin upon that cross and descended into Hell upon that cross, and He can't say, "it is finished" until all are finished in the image of God.

So, as long as we say, "some can't be found," we say, "Jesus can't be finished.

As long as we say, "some can't be saved," we leave Jesus on the cross.

As long as we consign people to Hell, we consign Jesus to Hell.

He said, "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to me, and the Father is in me."

Well, whatever the case. This father goes to the dark field to be with His prodigal older son, but when he goes to the field, he brings the party with him.

God is the party.

God is Love.

God is a consuming fire.

The father's kindness must burn his son's pride. This son is in outer darkness where he meets consuming fire. The fire is Love, and it burns away pride. Scripture says, "*Every eye will look on the one whom they have pierced,*" and Paul writes, "*and so all Israel will be saved.*" So, maybe God threw this party for His younger son AND His older son, so that his older son would become more lost and know he was lost. So his father could find him in the dark, and shine in the darkness, and they all could party—all dead and all alive; for no one deserves the party but all are worthy of the party.

The party is Grace and the party is Judgment.

You know...I think I've got some of each brother in me, some of me was lost and is found, and so loves Grace. And some of me is still lost and thus burned by Grace. So when I throw parties for people that can't pay me back, my older brother is often exposed and gets burned, and sometimes he's found.

I mean, Grace offends my pride and then sets me free to party. I wish we had time to tell the stories, but in throwing parties for the last and least, parties in the darkest of places. I've seen that Jesus is there and always has been there, preparing a heart for Grace, and I get to announce Grace. Then we all party!

And there, it's obvious: No one deserves this party, but all are worth this party, and so I don't deserve this party, but I'm worth the party. I am worth the *ousias* and *bios* of my Father, and then I begin to party, and that's repentance.

See? When I throw parties for the lost...sometimes I'm found.

The party is judgment.

The party is redemption.

To join the party is repentance.

So to party is your penance!

Think about it; if that boy had a penance, what would it be? It would be the party. so if you're concerned about your sin, your penance is to celebrate God's Grace. It's to throw parties for all and party with all.

My friend Tony Campollo used to tell about a night when he found himself wide-awake at 3:30am due to jet lag. He was in some city where he was to speak. But now, he was alone with nothing to do. He walked down to the street and into a dingy little diner. The fat guy behind the counter shoved him a doughnut and some coffee, and a bill that included some tax.

About that time eight or nine prostitutes walked in. They sat near Tony. Their talk was loud and very crude. Disgusted...Tony was ready to leave when he overheard: "Tomorrow's my birthday. I'll be thirty nine." A second voice said, "So what? What do you want from me? A birthday cake and a Coke? You want me to sing 'Happy Birthday'?" The first one said, "Come on, why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that's all. I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should you give me a birthday cake? I've never had one my whole life."

Campollo waited until the women left, and he asked that fat guy behind the counter:

"Do they come in every night?".... "Yea."

"How about the one right next to me?"...."Yea, that's Agnes. Why do you want to know?"

"It's her birthday tomorrow. What do you say we throw a party?"

The fat guy thought a minute, smiled and said, "That's great; I like Agnus." His name was Harry. He said, "I'll bring the cake and spread the word."

At 2:30am the next night, Campollo came back with decorations. He had a big sign that said, "Happy Birthday Agnes!" At 3:15am it was wall-to-wall hookers, Harry and Tony. At 3:30 Agnus arrived. They all screamed, "Happy Birthday Agnus!" And they sang to Agnus.

When Agnes saw the cake, she broke down weeping. Harry said, “Agnes...cut the cake. We want cake!” Finally, Agnes composed herself and said softly as she looked at the cake: “Look Jerry, is it okay if I just look at it a little while? It was like Agnus had turned zero; Harry had turned zero and Tony had turned zero. Harry said, “Sure. Take it home, if you want.” She said, “Oh can I?” She looked at Tony and said, “I live right down the street. I just want to take it home.” She picked it up like it was the holy grail—the communion cup— and walked out. At that, no one knew quite what to do. So they all looked at Tony. Well, being a pastor and not knowing what to do, Tony said, “Let’s pray.”

So he led them all in prayer for Agnes. When he was done, Harry leaned over with some hostility and said, “Hey! You never told me you were a *preacher!*” What kind of church do you belong to?” Campolo said, “A church that throws parties for hookers at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry said, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was a church like that, I’d join...I’d join a church like that!”

What Harry didn’t realize was that he already was a church like that.
Harry the tax collector, Agnus the harlot, Tony the Pharisee, and Jesus.

Let’s be a church like that.

Jesus’ church is like that...

Because Jesus is like that.

Jesus throws parties for tax collectors and sinners.
Jesus throws parties for people like us.
And the party transforms the harlot into His Bride.

Communion

So the night before we took His life, He *gave* His life.

He took the bread and broke it saying, “This is my body; take and eat.” Take His substance—His *ousias*. And He took the cup saying, “This is the new covenant in my blood,” “*The life is in the blood*”—His life—His *bios*.

Jesus is here and He’s hosting a party. Won’t you come?

You can’t pay for the party; the party is free, but you do have to *lose* something...your pride...because it’s your pride that wrecks the party.

Prayer

Lord God, your name is revealed to us in Jesus the Christ. Your name is “Yahweh is Salvation.” You are the Light in the darkness. Lord Jesus, you are the Word of Truth. You are the Revelation of Love. And so Lord God we thank you that your love is not dependent upon *our* choice. What an utterly insane and even evil idea; who would’ve told us such a thing? For you are Love. How can you be dependent on our choice? Instead our choice, our good free choice, is dependent on You, your love, your story of love. Lord Jesus you are the story that the Father is telling. At the end of a love story something is produced and that something is faith, it’s trust, the good free choice. It’s the son running home to the father saying, “Oh Dad...I’m so glad that you are my Dad. I just want to be home; Dad, I want to party with you.”

Thank you Father, because we’re beginning to see it. I know I believe the lie so much, but I thank you that I get to announce the truth to others, because sometimes when I throw parties for others, I begin to believe, a little bit, the party for myself and I’m found.

Benediction

Say this prayer with me where you are, right now: “Lord God, thank you for your love. Now may your Love be made manifest in me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”