

Lost Boys & How to Find Them

Luke 15

Pastor Peter Hiatt

November 12, 2006

I don't know exactly how to tell you this, but last week I was down on East Colfax for the "Save our City Pastors Coalition Meeting." Walking back to my car around 10 p.m., I noticed a motel window. The curtains were drawn, and I could hear loud music. In the window I saw some women dancing. (I knew their profession). They were dancing with some ugly men. The cars parked outside the motel read "Internal Revenue Service" on the doors... tax collectors.

I was ready to leave in disgust, when all at once I spied a familiar face. It was Aram Haroutunian, and he wasn't preaching. He had a plate of baklava and a bottle of red wine. He was laughing and dancing around the room.

I was utterly shocked. I was standing out in this field next to the motel. I wasn't about to go in so I started screaming, "Aram, Aram." Finally he came out. I said, "Aram, you better explain yourself," but he couldn't. He just told me some stories—something about sheep, coins, and kids.

Well... at a time like this we need the Word of God.
Luke 15:1-3,

Now the tax collectors and sinners [prostitutes] 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 this parable: [this story, actually three stories.]

Now I should tell you I'm lying about Aram (it didn't actually happen). I'm lying about Aram but not about Jesus. Jesus not only welcomed tax collectors and sinners, he hosted parties for them and treated them as honored guests.

Just before this in Luke 14 he told everyone, "When you throw a party, do it for those that can't repay you," those that are unworthy. And that makes sense 'cause people that think they're worthy—proud people—will always wreck a good party.

Now standing in a field, the pastors' coalition, the Scribes and Pharisees, confront Jesus, and He tells 'em stories: three parallel stories about four things that are lost.

First, He tells them about one sheep that is lost, and the shepherd who leaves the 99 in the wilderness to seek the lost.

The sheep is lost,
 then found,
 then celebrated.
 There's a party.

Then Jesus says.

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.

Now, are there 99 righteous persons that need no repentance? That's a God joke.

Isaiah 53:6, the Pharisees had it memorized, "All we like sheep have gone astray [lost]. We have turned, everyone to his own way."

Well, He tells ‘em about a shepherd and His lost sheep.
Then, He tells ‘em about a woman and her lost coin.

She searches everywhere, and when she finds it she
throws a party and Jesus says, “Just so, I tell you, there is
joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus is saying, “You’d search for a lost sheep if
you were a shepherd (and they were called to be
shepherds). Wouldn’t you search for a sheep? And you’d
certainly search for a silver coin.

And why is that? Because they are intrinsically
valuable. They are *amorally* valuable. I mean they are
valuable regardless of their moral choices.

Inanimate objects can’t make moral decisions, and
yet they can be of priceless value—treasure.

Shepherds usually don’t worry about the ethics of
their sheep and if that one sheep had a bumper sticker, it
wouldn’t say, “I Found It,” but “The Shepherd Found Me.”
That’s not to the sheep’s credit.

Well, Jesus tells ‘em a story
about a lost sheep
and then a lost coin
and now another lost something.

And once again,
the something is sought after,
the something is found,
and once again a party is thrown.

Verse 11,

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 that is coming to me.'

Which basically meant, "Father I want your stuff, and I wish you were dead."

Every time we sin I think we say that.
Every time we sin I think we do that. . .
Steal God's gifts and pound the nails.

In the garden, I think we did that. We said, "I want the knowledge of You, but not You." And we were lost. A world was lost.

He said, "Father give me the share of the property that is coming to me." And this father "divided his inheritance between them."

Get that? Between both of them. They are both lost. Both want the father's stuff and wish He were dead.

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.

In the words of the prophets, “Israel played the whore”—a Jew selling himself and selling his inheritance to a pig farmer. Next verse,

*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” and yet *himself* is the problem.

*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.
Treat me as one of your hired servants.”
And he arose and came to his father.*

Why? He wants to be an employee. An employee receives *nothing* by grace. He earns his wage. An employee gets the boss’ stuff but not the boss. He doesn’t want the boss. An employee works the system (like his older brother). He honors the boss with his lips though his heart is far from him. His plan is to be like his older brother.

This boy is still lost. He’s always been lost, never more so than now. He doesn’t want to be a *son* but an *employee*. He practices his lines, ending with “make me like one of your hired servants.” It looks like repentance, but I think it’s just intelligent evil (the worst kind.)

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 [over and over and over... This is implied in the Greek.]

Before the son could say anything, do anything, the Father saw him—had compassion on him. He came down from the house and ran to him, humiliating himself before all.

He found him at the edge of the village, the edge of the city, and showered him with kisses—his banquet of grace.

Next verse,

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. He no longer asks to be an employee. He can only say, “I am unworthy.”

You know if you think you’re worthy, you can’t truly believe that you are a son, for a son is first a baby. A son is a son entirely by grace.

If you won’t admit you’re unworthy, you can never know grace.

That is, you can never know your Father, for He is grace.

It’s even grace that makes the boy admit he was unworthy.

“It’s his kindness that leads us to repentance.”

It's the holy kiss that reveals the boy is lost,
 judges his heart,
 and calls him home.

Next verse,

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.

That's the third story and once again,
 something's lost,
 something's sought after,
 something's found,
 and there is a party,
 an expensive party.

Jesus says,
 "You rejoice at lost sheep, lost coins, why not lost boys?"

 Well, because lost sheep and lost coins
 have intrinsic, amoral value.

Well, what about boys and girls... people? Do they?
 Ask a parent—ask a father.

 You know most all of our relationships in society
 are based on a person's resumé, their record of moral
 judgments—except for the relationship between a parent
 and their child.

You see, babies don't have resumé. Babies really are good for nothing—just good. A parent sees it.

In my diary after Elizabeth was born I wrote, “She’s kind of like a Jesus in a tortilla sort of miracle.” I don’t know what she’s good for—just good, image of God, breath of God, just a person without a resumé. A baby—just good.

I remember when I was a young father, I’d kneel by my children’s bed and think, “How could I ever *not* love you? ‘I love you forever, I like you for always, as long as I’m living my baby you’ll be.’ No matter what you do in this world, no matter what you decide, you’ll always still be at least this: baby—breath of God—absolute wonder.”

I’d put my face to their pudgy little cheeks, I’d listen to them breathe and I’d think, “How could I ever not love you?”

Well, that was 16 years ago. Now I’m the father of three teenagers and one 12 year old, and those pudgy cheeks now have whiskers. And they’ve each accrued an impressive resumé. And so it’s easier to lose sight of the *baby* for it’s covered in *employee*; to lose sight of the *miracle* ‘cause it’s covered in *resumé*.

And yet there are these moments—there are these bittersweet moments—when they come walking down the road from the far country, stripped of their resumé, their ego, their accomplishments and pretense... moments when they’ve failed or think they’ve failed.

Bitter because it hurts; sweet because I see them. I see them, have compassion on them, and then I can kiss them—*them*, just them.

You see, I can only love them purely when they’re stripped of the idea that they’ve earned it.

And they can only receive my love purely when they're stripped of the idea they've earned it.

If you feel like a total failure, unworthy of God's love, rejoice for at last you can receive it. You can't truly be found unless you know that you're lost.

Well... I think I love my kids way more now than I did then because they've been lost and found, lost and found, lost and found. Lost and sought after with everything I had and found.

Have you ever lost a child? We lost Becky at Elitch's, Coleman at Disneyland. When it happens you literally forget everything, and you give everything to find them. And when you find them you throw an outrageous, spontaneous party, screaming, hugging, and crying in the middle of Disneyland. It's just about the greatest joy a person can know.

Children don't only get lost at Disneyland,
they get lost in Las Vegas...
in the Stock Market...
in adultery and murder and greed.

They get lost 'cause they don't know the way.

Can you see them?

Do you care?

Have you met The Way?

I was talking to Susan about this, and she said,

Do you remember when we lived in L.A.? I told you how I was coming home one day, and there was a terrible accident. A man was thrown from his vehicle, lying dead in the street. Well, the police had stopped traffic to

take measurements. Cars were honking, people were yelling, and I saw this woman jump out of her car and run to the dead man in the middle of the road. She bent down and covered him with her coat. Then she stood up, turned around, and screamed to all the angry commuters, “He was somebody’s baby. He was somebody’s baby.”

It changes things, doesn’t it?

Take a look at the person next to you (just do it).

What if they’re somebody’s baby. That changes things, doesn’t it? Would you seek them if they were lost? Would you look for them?

What if those tax collectors and prostitutes were somebody’s baby?

What if Saddam Hussein is somebody’s baby?

What if every American soldier is somebody’s baby?

What if every Iraqi is somebody’s baby?

What if the person you resent most is somebody’s baby?

What if every person driving down I-70 behind me is somebody’s baby?

What if every starving AIDS orphan in Africa is somebody’s baby?

What if each one is God’s baby, and what if you are their brother?

And what if you could feed one and bless one for just a few cents each day?

But, what if, instead, you’d rather supersize your lunch or buy designer jeans? Because you really don’t care or really don’t want to care?

What if?

Well, think about that as you drive home from church in your \$30,000 car and then park in the garage of your \$300,000 house.

And if by chance you're feeling just about as guilty as hell, go into the bathroom, look in the mirror, and ask yourself, "What if that person in the mirror is somebody's baby?" In fact, God's baby. What if they're God's baby? Just lost... how do you find them?

Well, there's one more lost thing in Luke, chapter 15:

Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [The Greek word translated music is "symphoni." It means many sounds or voices in harmony. He heard harmony and he was out of harmony.] 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.

What if God threw a banquet of grace for your worst enemy (the person you resent the most)? Would you go?

To the degree you hate grace,
you hate God.
God is grace.

That is the degree to which you hate your Father,
that is also the degree to which you are lost.

Well, this boy is extremely lost.
He thought he'd stayed home,
but he never was at home.

Home is where the heart is.
And his heart is alone in a field,
his own private hell.

Jesus said, "Many will come from east and west and recline at table... 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."

So anyway, if God threw a banquet of grace for your worst enemy (like a brother you resent more than anyone) Would you go? Or judge yourself out? Out of the great banquet. Next verse,

His father came out and entreated him.

That is, he saw him while he was still a long way off and felt compassion for him. He humbled himself and descended into that field (where men weep and gnash teeth), and there he showered him with a banquet of grace. This boy is shaming his father, and the father is bleeding grace but the boy...

he answered his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.

And yet he broke his father's heart, and he's crucifying it—just now. All these years that he worked for his father, he hated his father. He was using his father, like an employee, like a man uses a harlot. Just like his brother treated women in the far country, this boy treats his father in his own house.

And he can't even see it.

He's lost.

The degree to which you hide your sin and won't confess your sin, that

is the degree to which you hide from grace,
 is the degree to which you hide from God,
 is the degree to which you hide from your
 heavenly Father and cannot taste his
 banquet,
 is the degree to which you won't be found,
 but choose to be lost.

I never disobeyed your commands. Yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. [I wonder if he has any friends. He certainly doesn't consider his father and brother friends.] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!

Remember, the father had given him the estate and so this party is thrown at the expense of the older brother. Granted, the father gave him everything he had. Everything the older brother has is gift so he shouldn't be stingy, and

yet throwing parties for prodigals does cost him.

He says to his father, “You killed the fatted calf for him! For him?!”

Do you think the father sacrificed the calf only for the younger lost boy or for the older lost boy as well?

You know, I resent gifts to others especially at my expense. I get angry at God’s mercy—angry at grace. And to the degree I do, I’m lost.

Good thing the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

How does God save the lost? Well, at least in this story He seeks them and saves them with banquets of grace.

From the start, the father gives grace—His entire world (creation).

At the edge of the city and in the field, the father gives grace (incarnation).

At the end of the story, it takes the form of a great banquet of grace (exaltation... on a cross)

The banquet is thrown for the prodigal son. But it’s also thrown for his older brother. For the older brother, because the father wants the older brother to help serve. It’s a gift... to help him serve the banquet. For it’s what the oldest boy needs most. He’s rich and utterly alone. He’s lost.

The father is finding both lost boys with one banquet. He’s finding both prostitutes and Pharisees with the same banquet of grace.

People have asked me who is Lookout called to reach? Baby boomers? Baby busters? Black, white, poor, rich, etc, etc. Well, I think I know. We're called to reach lost boys, and they come in two varieties:

Younger and Older

Prostitutes and Pharisees

Nonreligious and Religious

We're called to reach the most lost.

Over the years one person has become rather sacramental to me in that regard. Her name is Elaine (it means light). But she was raised in darkness—ritually abused by her father and a Satanic coven.

At one time I had never met someone that seemed more lost. But now I've watched as Jesus has found her in the most horrific places over and over again. (And yet He was always with her.) She was imprisoned in shadows and lost in fear. But He comes to her darkness, puts shoes of freedom on her feet. He puts a ring, the family ring, on her finger and He puts his robe of righteousness on her wounded flesh. His robe is a wedding dress for her, for she is His bride.

Recently, she quit her job to follow a dream and that is loving AIDS orphans in Africa. She is the mother of the living.

I've told you her story because you see, it's my story—my testimony. God has used me to find her and in finding her, find me.

You see, I'm an older brother, lost and alone—not in a far country, but right at home.

Well, ministering to Elaine has been one of the costliest things Susan and I have every done—numerous hours and sleepless nights, demons in our house, even

harassing our kids. And yet over and over when I've felt distant from God, lost and alone, I knew I needed to pray for Elaine or someone like her 'cause when I minister to Elaine, God reveals His banquet of grace. He reveals it through me, and yet it is *for* me—because her story is my story. It's our story.

And so, seeking the lost,
 I'm found.
 Serving the banquet,
 I feast on the banquet.

Both of us lost and both of us found
 with the same banquet.

Gregg O'Leary writes:

I was walking down a dimly lit street late one evening when I heard muffled screams coming from behind a clump of bushes. Alarmed, I slowed down to listen, and panicked when I realized that what I was hearing were the unmistakable sounds of a struggle: heavy grunting, frantic scuffling, the tearing of fabric. Only yards from where I stood, a woman was being attacked. [She was lost.]

Should I get involved? I was frightened for my own safety, and cursed myself for having suddenly decided to take a new route home that night. What if I became another statistic? [He realized that mercy might dearly cost him and besides, maybe the

woman was partly to blame. Well, he was tempted not to love. But when we don't love, we're lost because love is the way. He continues...]

Although it seemed like an eternity, the deliberation in my head had taken only seconds, but already the girls' cries were growing weaker. I knew I had to act fast. How could I walk away from this? No, I finally resolved, I could not turn my back on the fate of this unknown woman, even if it meant risking my own life [losing my life].

I am not a brave man, nor am I athletic. I don't know where I found the moral courage and physical strength, but once I had finally resolved to help the girl, I became strangely transformed. I ran behind the bushes and pulled the assailant off the woman. Grappling, we fell to the ground, where we wrestled for a few minutes until the attacker jumped up and escaped. Panting hard, I scrambled upright and approached the girl who was crouched behind a tree, sobbing. In the darkness, I could barely see her outline, but I could certainly sense her trembling shock.

Not wanting to frighten her further, I at first spoke to her from a distance. "It's okay," I said soothingly. "The man ran away. You're safe now."

There was a long pause and then I heard her words, uttered in wonder, in amazement. “Dad, is that you?” And then, from behind the tree, stepped my youngest daughter, Katherine.

His baby, God’s baby. And you see, seeking the lost, he had been found.

Serving the banquet, you ingest the banquet, and spread the banquet.

Back in 2002 I preached a sermon titled, “The Bride Feeling Sexy.” In it I talked about Elaine and a white wedding dress that Jesus led her to buy and hang on her bedroom door. It is sacramental.

It reminds her she is Christ’s Bride, and He will never rape her, only romance her. For when she surrenders her shame to Him, He covers her with mercy. And when she looks at the dress in faith, Satan is bound and cannot enter.

We preached. *We*, because sermons rise out of the body, not just me. I’m the mouth. I just tell *our* story. You even pay me to do it. We preached.

A few years later, I got a CD from a recording artist, Brian Cheney. He heard that sermon and wrote a song called, “The Bride” (#5 on the CD). It’s the song Justin played for the offertory. I don’t know how many people have heard that song.

Last year, I got a letter from a woman in California. She’d been ritually abused and forced into prostitution as a child. She’d been oppressed by demons day and night. She thought that God could never love her. She was alone and wanted to die. Someone gave her a tape. It had a blank

cover, and she didn't know where it came from. For years she played that tape when she struggled most, and it kept her going. She eventually found a church and last year on the internet, she found the source of the tape. It was you. It was Lookout Mountain Community Church. And it was that sermon, "The Bride Feeling Sexy."

I think our target audience is
her... and me,
the Prostitute and the Pharisee.

Last night a woman told me, "If it weren't for that message, I think I'd be dead."

Last week Dee Dee Marsh came in to see me. She told me that because of that sermon she set out one day to buy a wedding dress to remind her she wasn't lost. She was Christ's Bride. Through an extraordinary encounter, she bought 950 wedding dresses. Now she has a ministry selling wedding dresses, yet giving scores away. She gives them to lost women who've forgotten who they are. Now serving the banquet, she feasts on the banquet.

Well, that sermon may be the most fruitful we've ever preached. And it may be the most offensive.

It cost us attenders.

It cost us dignity, independence, and pride

You see, the Father's grace
exposes our lack of grace.

So I've found the most offensive sermons are the most gracious sermons. They make us lose our life. But, unless you lose your life (lost), you can't be found.

See, the Father's banquet of grace judges us older brothers. It forces us to admit that we're lost and then be found or leave—that is, get more lost.

Do you remember that the Gospel is called the offense of this world? It forces us to admit that we're lost and then be found or leave—that is, get more lost. More lost.

Maybe that's good.

For if you're more lost,
 maybe you'll finally admit you're lost,
 and then you can realize that you've
 been found.

Then you can join the party.

The older brother said, "You killed the fatted calf 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.

Well, just like the tax collectors and prostitutes, just like the younger brother, the older brother was lost. He was sought after, and he was offered a banquet of grace. But will he let himself be found? That's where the story ends.

Some commentators wonder, "Where's Jesus?" The Pharisees had asked about Jesus. In this story, where is Jesus?

Well, don't we see it? He's standing in a field entreating scribes and Pharisees (older brothers) to come to

His banquet. He is the Father, come to us in humility and grace.

Well, the older brothers want His stuff, and they wish He was dead. They want knowledge, power, and fame, but not Him—the One who is Love. And so they kill Him, in a field at the edge of the city.

There, these older brothers will become utterly lost. Jerusalem will be destroyed and there Jesus will serve up the Great Banquet of unspeakable grace (His Body and His Blood) for He came to seek and to save the lost.

So on that night, He took bread and He broke it saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup and He said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you. Do it in remembrance of me.”

And so we invite you to come to His banqueting table. Tear it off a piece of the bread, dip it into the cup. The black cups are wine. The purple cups are juice. They’re both mercy.

But as you come, would you drop your resume? You’re a child by grace. Drop your resume. Take His body; take His blood. You see, He has something to give you:

A robe of righteousness,
A new identity,
Freedom.

Believe the Gospel, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Benediction

Lord Jesus, Your banner over us is love. And we can see the love of God in this place because we look on body broken and blood shed because You were exalted, You were lifted up on a cross so that we could all see Your glory which is love spilled out for those that are lost. You are mercy. You are the bleeding heart of our Father who is love, and we worship you and we thank you. Just look at our lives. Lord, that's what the song says, "Just look at our lives," and we're so silly we think that means that we drive Cadillacs and have townhomes or something. But, oh God, it means that we were lost, and You are the great Savior. And so Father, scripture says that angels long to look into our salvation. I think that means for all eternity, they'll be saying stuff like this, "Oh, just look at Elaine. She was so lost, and He got her. He found her, and He bled for her, and He took her wounds. Oh, and look at Peter... was He lost. He thought he was God. He thought he made himself. He thought he saved himself. He thought he was his own father, and Jesus ambushed Peter in Elaine. Oh God, you are great for, God, you seek and save the lost. You lost Your one sheep, didn't You, Father, to save the 99? The slaughtered lamb now stands on the throne. And Father, You gave up Your treasure, didn't You? To find Your people. Father, You sacrificed Your son for His brothers. Oh Lord Jesus, we praise You and we thank You for Your love. We admit to You that Your banquet scares us because Your love just won't stop. And so, Lord Jesus, I pray now that You would put Your robe on us, Your ring on our finger, and Your shoes on our feet. Lord, when I preach I get scared sometimes 'cause I think, "Oh, my gosh, maybe

what I said is true.” And Lord, I think when people listen sometimes, we get scared. And so, Lord Jesus, we come to Your table a bit naked, like our resume has been stripped away from us. And now, Lord Jesus, would You cover us with what You desire to cover us with? He puts a robe of righteousness on your back. It’s His righteousness, not yours. It’s a gift. Your inheritance. He puts a ring on your finger. It means you’re a part of the family. Maybe it’s a wedding ring. Maybe it’s a signet ring. It’s your identity. He puts shoes on your feet. If you came to this table, with just a mustard seed of faith... you’re free. He set you free. We’re only beginning to feel how much He set us free in this world of sorrow and pain. And you’re just at the edge of the party. You’re just tasting it. You’re just at the edge of the party and in this world, the party hurts because this world doesn’t understand the party. But one day it will turn into absolute ecstasy forever and ever and ever. So have hope. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come to my banquet, Believe my Word.
 I put a robe on your back,
 I put a ring on your finger.
 I put shoes on your feet.

And now by way of practical application point... you want a practical application point? Okay. Get those cards, you know, that you’re going to be mailed this week... this sermon was about that (it was about a lot more than that), but you see this church, this Lookout Mountain Community Church, that God set up to worship Him to commune with Him is also called to seek and to save the lost. And so we save the lost out there, and we save the lost in here. And it’s something that we do together. And so,

this week would you take some time and pray and say, “God, how much do you want me to give to You through Lookout Mountain Community Church?”

All you have belongs to God, okay? It is the Father’s and yet He’s given it to us, and so it all really belongs to Him. That’s what He wants from us, and so we give it all back. The money you give to your kids for lunch or whatever, that’s His, and He wants you to give your kids money for lunch. But part of it, if this is your church, I think He wants you to give here so that we can give ourselves away. I’m just asking, would you pray about that this week and do a little planning. We’re not going to chase you down like Fran said, it just helps us as we plan. It helps us as you plan, and then next week we’ll come together and we’ll lay ‘em up here at the front of the church as part of our worship.

If you’d like prayer, members of our prayer ministry team are down front. They’d love to pray with you. God bless you, in Jesus’ name.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Later Jesus and his disciples were at home having supper with a collection of disreputable guests. Unlikely as it seems, more than a few of them had become followers. The religion scholars and Pharisees saw him keeping this kind of company and lit into his disciples: “What kind of example is this, acting cozy with the riffraff?”

~ Mark 2:15-16

To understand what Jesus was doing in eating with “sinners,” it is important to realize that in the east, even today, to invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness. In short, sharing a table means sharing life.... Thus, Jesus’ meals with the publicans and sinners ... are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus (Mark 2:17), eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end-time (Matthew 8:11, par.), in which the community of the saints is already being represented (Mark 2:19). The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table fellowship,, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.

~ J. Jeremias

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: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? . . . 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? . . . 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. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them.

~ Luke 15:1-4, 7-8, 10-12

For over fifteen years I have been asking people of all walks of life from Morocco to India and from Turkey to the Sudan about the implications of a son’s request for his inheritance while the father is still living. The answer has

almost always been emphatically the same. As I have noted elsewhere, the conversation runs as follows:

“Has anyone ever made such a request in your village?”

“Never!”

“Could anyone ever make such a request?”

“Impossible!”

“If anyone ever did, what would happen?”

“His father would beat him, of course!”

“Why?”

“This request means he wants his father to die!”

~ *Kenneth Baily, Through Peasant Eyes*

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, 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. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’

~ *Luke 15:13-19*

If the prodigal becomes a hired servant, he may be able to pay back what he has lost. In this connection Derrett writes,

Working as a hired servant (sleeping off the premises) he could see to it that eventually with his wages, if not in other ways, he could give his father what, so long as the father lived, was only his due.

With Derrett we can agree that the prodigal perhaps intended to work and thereby fulfill his moral responsibilities to the father. In losing the money he failed in these responsibilities. Now he will make up for what he has lost. In short, he will save himself. He wants no grace.

~ *Kenneth Baily, Through Peasant Eyes*

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. 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."

~ Luke 15:20-21

The son responds with only a part of his prepared speech. The listener/reader has already been told the entire speech and so knows what to expect. The offer of a solution, "Make me as one of your hired servants," is missing. Commentators too numerous to note assume that the father interrupted him. . . . Certainly this is not what the omission signifies. Given the prodigal's previous mind-set, sonship has certain distinct disadvantages. If he accepts sonship, he will have to live with his brother and be fed from his brother's property. He will again be under the total authority of his father. He will be denied the self-satisfaction of having "earned his own way." Accepting sonship requires a deliberate decision with broad ramifications. Clearly he has changed his mind. Via has understood the significance of this change. He writes, "Repentance finally turns out to be the capacity to forego pride and accept graciousness." Following this line of argument, we must ask, "Why did he change his mind?" and, more precisely, "What are the ramifications of his decision?" As we have seen, the prodigal comes home with a rabbinic understanding of repentance. He is shattered by his father's demonstration of love in humiliation. In his state of apprehension and fear he would naturally experience this unexpected deliverance as an utterly overwhelming event. Now he knows that he cannot offer any solution to their ongoing relationship. He sees that the point is not the lost money, but rather the broken relationship, which he cannot heal. Now he understands that any new relationship must be a pure gift from his father. He can offer no solution. To assume that he can compensate his father with his labor is an insult. "I am unworthy" is now the only appropriate response.

~ Kenneth Baily, *Through Peasant Eyes*

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. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to 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, but he answered his father, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!"

~ Luke 15:22-30

The difference between him and his younger brother was that the younger brother was estranged and rebellious while absent from the house, but the older son was estranged and rebellious in his heart while he was in the house. The estrangement and rebellion of the younger son were evident in his surrender to his passions and in his request to leave his father's house. The estrangement and rebellion of the older son were evident in his anger and his refusal to enter the house. . . . He [the older son] shows disgust with his father's house. [He says] "that I might make merry with my friends." Thus he is no better than the prodigal son who took his portion and traveled into a far country. The difference between them is that the prodigal son was an "honorable sinner" in that he was perfectly open to his father. He told his father all that was in his heart. But the older brother was a "hypocritical saint" because he hid his feeling in his heart. He remained in the house all the while hating his father. He denies any relationship to his brother, and thereby denies any relationship to his father. He says, "This is your son" rather than saying "my brother" . . . With this statement the older son removed himself from the sacred family and passed judgment of "outcast" upon himself.

~ *Ibrahim Said*

And he 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.'

~ *Luke 15:31-32*

The father butchers a calf. All the important people of the village will naturally attend. The anger and refusal to participate on the part of the older son are profoundly deep public insults against the father. The listener/reader expects anger . . . to burn within the heart of the father. He is expected to ignore the boy and proceed with the banquet, or in some way punish him for public insolence, or at least demonstrate extreme displeasure. However, for the second time in one day, the father goes down and out of the house offering in public humiliation a demonstration of unexpected love. Bornkamm writes, "Here, too, the father comes out, no less anxious for the older one, and entreating him, just as he had the younger one."

~ *Kenneth Baily, Through Poet Eyes*

Perhaps the most theologically damaging traditional misunderstanding of this parable is in the popular perception of the phrase, "He came to himself." This has long been interpreted as meaning "he repented." This reading of the text dulls its cutting edge and breaks up the theological unity of the chapter. The good shepherd must traverse the wilderness to find his sheep. He does not return to the village and wait for the sheep to wander home and bleat at the

door of the sheepfold. The good woman lights a lamp and searches diligently to find the lost coin. She does not resume her chores expecting the coin to flip itself out of a crack in the floor and land on the kitchen table. . . . The Pharisees complain, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus replies with this story, which in effect says, "Indeed, I do eat with sinners. But it is much worse than you imagine! I not only eat with them, I run down the road, shower them with kisses, and drag them in that I might eat with them!" Jesus is clearly talking about himself. By the end of the story, the father does what Jesus does. . . . The father does not say, "He was lost and has come home." Instead, we read, "He was lost and is found!" So who found him? The father did! Where did he find him? At the edge of the village! Thus, in the father's perceptions, the Prodigal was still lost and dead at the edge of the village. Even as the shepherd was obliged to go forth and pay a high price to find his sheep, and the good woman sought diligently to find her coin, even so the father went down and out in a costly demonstration of unexpected love to find and resurrect his son. The banquet is a celebration of the success of that finding and that resurrection.

~ Philip Bailey, *Christianity Today*

Birthdays need to be celebrated. I think it is more important to celebrate a birthday than a successful exam, a promotion, or a victory. Because to celebrate a birthday means to say to someone: "Thank you for being you." Celebrating a birthday is exalting life and being glad for it. On a birthday we do not say: "Thanks for what you did, or said, or accomplished." No, we say: "Thank you for being born and being among us."

~ Henri Nouwen

In a scene from the movie "Ironweed," the characters played by Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep stumble across an old Eskimo woman lying in the snow, probably drunk. Besetted themselves, the two debate what they should do about her.

"Is she drunk or a bum?" asks Nicholson.

"Just a bum. Been one all her life."

"And before that?"

"She was a whore in Alaska."

"She hasn't been a whore her whole life. Before that?"

"I dunno. Just a little kid, I guess."

"Well, a little kid's something. It's not a bum and it's not a whore. It's something. Let's take her in."

~ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace*

God's free grace is God Himself in His most inner and essential nature. God Himself as He is. That is God's secret, as it is now already revealed in Jesus Christ to those who hear and accept Him as God's Word, and as it will someday be revealed to all when the veil will be removed from all eyes, when it

will be revealed in its fullness, clarity, and blessedness to the eyes of all His creatures, even those who are now blinking, squinting and blind, even to our own evil and perverted Christian eyes. . . . God's free grace. Because it is free, it has the power to do its work even among us miserable sinners, to set its word even in our foolish and wicked hearts, and even on our filthy lips. David the adulterer and murderer was no hindrance to it, nor was Peter the denier, nor Saul the persecutor. Even the Church, which one might sometimes have reason to think of as the darkest of all dark places, even the Church is no hindrance to God's grace. We may trust it as being more powerful than us Christians, than the ocean of nonsense which precisely we Christians commit individually and collectively. Why should we not rely upon it? It is and will prove itself once again to be much more powerful than everything which the children of this world, in their absurdity and disobedience, can set against it.

~ Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*

Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker Movement admitted to the folly of her soup kitchen: "What a delightful thing it is, " she said, "to be boldly profligate, to ignore the price of coffee and go on serving the long line of destituted men who come to us, good coffee and the finest of bread."

~ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace*

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

~ Luke 19:10

© 2006 Peter Hiatt

Lookout Mountain Community Church
534 Commons Drive, Golden CO 80401
Phone: 303-526-9287 Fax: 303-526-9361
E-mail: info@lomcc.org