

A parable is a story with something hidden inside.

In the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells three different parables, the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, with the same “something” hidden inside. That “something” is a verbal image of God.

Today’s gospel reading begin with these words “All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.”

And the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling and saying, “Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.” And of course, the Pharisees were very correct in their observation. But they have a false image of God. They got all caught up imaging God as someone who wants us to keep laws and a God who excludes those who can’t or don’t keep them.

The Pharisees and the scribes think that God operates this way: the good people are keep the law and are “In” and the bad people are those who don’t keep the law and are “outsiders”. They are very disturbed because Jesus is keeping company and eating with the prostitutes and sinners.... He going over and making friends with the sinners.

But Jesus is has only one thought in mind he sees God as someone who wants to wants to bring everyone together! And so he tells three parables.

(pause)

For a moment this morning, using these three parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, let's try to look at things from God's point of view. It is not all that hard.

Ready to take on the mind of Christ? Here we go!

When I say "ninety nine", what do you think comes next? ... One hundred.

If I say "nine" what do you think comes next? ... Ten

If I say I have one hundred sheep and I lose one, what do you say? Where is the other one?

If I say I have ten coins and I lose one, what do you say? Where is the other one?

Now you are thinking like God!

God wants to bring all creation together. God never gives up on anyone.

Thinking with the mind of God is not always that easy. Here is a little harder question to answer; If I have two sons and one is angry with me, wants some of my money and wants to leave, how would I react?

- **Would I refuse to give him the money and send him to his room?**
- **Would I give him the money and tell him to get out and never come back?**
- **Would I complain about how ungrateful he is?**

Well if we react like that, and most of us would, Jesus says , “That is not how God would act. No.

- He gives him the money because he knows the son has much to learn
- He deeply grieves for his son
- He awaits his return
- He welcomes him on his return
- He throws a party so that all his family and friends can celebrate together as one family.

Remember, a parable is a story with something hidden inside. Hidden inside the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son is the teaching of who God is/ how God acts/ and the way God deals with us.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees (and us) that:

- God is like the shepherd with 100 sheep and will go anywhere to find the lost one. And when he does, he will put it on his shoulders and rejoices and then calls his friends together to rejoice with him because he has found his lost sheep.
- God is like a woman who has ten coins and loses one. She diligently sweeps the whole house and when she finds it she calls all her friend s and neighbors together and tells them, rejoice with me for I have found my lost coin.

- God is like a the father whose son takes off on him and then returns penniless begging. When he sees his son returning, he rejoices to have his son back, embraces him and throws a party to celebrate that he is back alive.

God is not happy until we are all back safe and sound. Then God rejoices when all, prostitutes, and sinners, Pharisee and scribe are together at the banquet table.

The hidden messages in these three parables are:

- There are no “insiders” and “outsiders” in the kingdom of God.
- You don’t have to be a saint to be invited to the banquet.
- **EVERYONE IS WELCOME!**

Jesus only requires one thing of us:

- We need to welcome everyone;
- forgive everyone;
- seek out and invite everyone.

Why? Because we are disciples of Jesus and his Father does not exclude; he includes everyone.

God is ready to welcome

- The young man who has been strung out on drugs
- The woman who has had an abortion
- The man who has just swindled you out of your last dollar

- The Jew and the Muslim and the atheist and Christians of every stripe.

Yes, Jesus says that is the way God thinks; everyone is welcome to the party.

All he asks of people is that if we accept the invitation we come to the party, we play by the one, which is: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

(Fr. Don then finished his homily by sharing his experience of his family reunion at a family farm in Canada which illustrated the way EVERYONE, no matter what they had gone through in life, were welcome. The wonderful experiences at family reunion at the farm as well as the hospitality of his sister and brother in law who own the farm has caused some of the young adults to want their weddings there. In their own way, the young adults were saying that the farm is “holy ground” because they have experienced the acceptance which reflects the very presence of God.)