

There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.... (Luke 15:7)

At our Church in the Park, I said that Jesus teaching us to count the cost makes us uncomfortable for several reasons. Jesus calls us to follow him despite our family (Luke 14:26). Jesus calls us to bear our cross (14:27). Jesus even calls us to renounce all that we have (14:33). Yet, he also leaves us with a promise – both now and in eternity. Those who have lost family, friends, or possessions, have family, riches, and reward all wrapped up in the Church, the Body of Christ. And, in the end, we will be with Jesus in eternal life! Yes, there's a cost to following Jesus. How much greater, though, is the reward!

In September, we're going to hear a text that does the opposite to us. At first, it won't seem uncomfortable at all. At the beginning of Luke 15, tax collectors and sinners are drawing near to Jesus in repentance to hear him further and to receive the salvation he brings. In the hearing of the Pharisees and leaders who despise these people, Jesus tells two parables in which he shows himself to be the one who seeks and saves the lost. In the first, a shepherd fervently searches for a lost sheep – and he rejoices when he finds it! How much more fervent and joyful is our Lord Jesus when he comes upon one of his dear lost ones, placing them on his shoulders on Calvary as he carries their sin!

It's when we listen more closely, though, that we might start to get uncomfortable. The Old Testament reading makes clear that this seeking isn't simply about evangelism. The Lord said he would judge between sheep and sheep (Ezekiel 34:17). The contrast, then, isn't between sheep and goats, as it were, but between two groups among the sheep. Some are receptive and repentant, and others are resistant and self-righteous. In Jesus' words, the distinction is between the 'sinners' of society who are seeking Jesus in repentance and the 'righteous' of society who think they have no need for Jesus.

This parable, though, is not just for them. It's for us as well. Yes, it is beautiful to know that Jesus seeks the lost to bring them to salvation! But, it is also a warning. With his words, Jesus holds a mirror up to us, his sheep. Are we grumbling? Why? Do we grumble when visitors come to our congregation but sit in our pew? Do we grumble when someone here might be 'undesirable' because of his reputation or past? Do we grumble at children in the service who are noisy or messy? Do we grumble for other reasons?

Jesus doesn't call us to grumble. He's called us to repentant joy. First, we should realize that we are indeed sinners in need of Christ – now and always! Jesus sought us, found us, and put us on his shoulders to bring us home. But, we should never forget that we are constantly tempted to grumble in a self-righteous pride which makes us out to be better than others or pretends as if we have no need for the Lord Jesus or his salvation. May God save us from such pride! Instead, may we draw near to Jesus in repentant joy!

-Pastor Squire

“Praise to You and adoration, blessed Jesus, Son of God, who, to serve Your own creation, came to share our flesh and blood. Guide me that I never may from Your fold or pastures stray, but with zeal and joy exceeding follow where Your steps are leading.”

(“Praise to You and Adoration,” *LSB* 692, v. 1)