

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.”

The Old Testament lesson gives insight into the mind and work of God. Hear again what the Lord said through the Prophet Micah: “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” That’s something, isn’t it? God who he is and what he does and it’s quite a comforting thing. God’s desire and what he takes delight in is the forgiveness of sins; your sins.

Now jump forward after Micah to the time when Jesus was walking among his people. Luke tells you in the Gospel reading, “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.’” The Greek grammar here shows that this is something Jesus was doing on a regular basis. The Pharisees and scribes grumbled.

The Pharisees and scribes are upset that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them but, what does this mean? They are upset that Jesus shows mercy and compassion. Let that sink in a for a second. They are upset with Jesus because he came to work repentance and forgive. But, remember what God told you about himself in the reading from Micah.

Jesus was around sinners and sat down to eat with them. This doesn’t mean he approved of sin but rather he came to redeem sinners. Nowhere does it say, “Jesus affirms or tolerates sin.” That’s what often, though, due to our sinful hearts, the sinful world, and the devil want us to read into a statement like this in the Gospels. Yet, never does Jesus approve of sin. That would not only defeat the purpose for which he came to redeem his people but would make him a liar when he calls people to repentance; to turn from their sin. Sin is a problem, a real deadly problem and condition that rightly stands under God’s wrath and punishment. Jesus himself said earlier in Luke 5, in fact to the Pharisees who said something almost identical to this statement in our Gospel reading which is ten chapters later in Luke 15.

In Luke 5 it is written, “And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’” Jesus associated with sinners to call them to repentance because he came to save them. When he associated with sinners, he taught them and preached to them. And so here, in this instance of Luke 15, there are two groups who have drawn near with the purpose of hearing Jesus teach. There are the tax collectors and sinners and there are the Pharisees and scribes. These two groups are very different from one another and yet still in the same situation on their own.

Really these two groups can be broadened and understood in two ways. The first group are those who break all the Commandments and are sinners. The second are those who outwardly follow the Commandments and are sinners. Both groups are sinners even though they may act differently in an outward way. Jesus preaches to both groups just as he preaches to you this way no matter who you may be with the same purpose. Jesus desires both to repent just as he said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

This Gospel reading today is the whole chapter of Luke 15. It’s the Christian faith. That God would seek and save the lost means everything. It’s very chief thing for which the whole Christian church exists. The thing in this too is that you are included in this account. God has sought you out and he has redeemed you.

The fact that Jesus does call sinners to repentance is in no way in opposition to what Micah says about the compassion and mercy of God. These two things are not pit against each other. The great error in modern thinking is that compassion, mercy, and love involve no conceptions of sin, the wrath of God, the fear of God, and repentance. Why is

that? You see what Jesus does, is downright offensive if you have no place in your heart for someone to have a place in the Kingdom of God who has sinned. The Gospel is stumbling block apart from faith. That's because the way our minds and hearts work apart from faith are in terms of merit, vengeance, and self-righteousness. The fact that God would show compassion to sinners is unthinkable to the sinful heart and mind.

It's also true to think that sin has no consequences and that no payment must be made. This is where Jesus steps in and is the sacrifice for your sin. He is Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Sin is deadly and you need redemption. God has compassion and God calls you to repentance. Both statements are true.

Jesus answered the Pharisees and scribes. But how did he do this? Well, he did it with these three parables in Luke 15, or it could be argued it's all really one big parable, to teach them about repentance and to teach them about who God is, who, by the way, they are rejecting by their self-righteousness and failing to see the Lord who has shown them mercy and is in their midst before their faces. Notice then what Luke wrote inspired by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus did in answer to the charge and accusation of the Pharisees against Jesus.

So he [Jesus] 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? 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 no repentance."

Jesus laid before them, and you that God cares for his people. He goes after those who have gone astray. He came to seek and to save the lost, to save you. He still is going after those who are outside his flock. He sends out his word to accomplish his purpose of working repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit through the word of God converts people. God's law reveals their sin and kills. The Gospel creates faith and delivers Christ and his forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is all God's work fully and completely even as he uses human instruments such as missionaries, pastors, and every Christian in his vocation to speak the words of God and confess Christ to the world. Luke 14 ends with Jesus saying, "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." God calls us all to hear and to confess his word, to be salt of the earth that has not lost its saltiness.

A fascinating detail included in this parable about the lost sheep is expanded upon in the second parable about the lost coin. Again, Jesus said, "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 me, 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."

The devil wants to devour you. He wants to you bring down and away from God. In the *Large Catechism* Luther has this to say about the work of the devil that he "tries every trick and does not stop until he finally wears us out, so that we either renounce our faith or throw up our hands and put up our feet, becoming indifferent or impatient." When sin is overlooked or written off as not harmful then that is the work of the devil plain and simple. When you buy into that and either give up the faith or just become indifferent to your sin or unrepentant and tolerating the sin of the world, then you're not remaining steadfast in the faith but rather you're letting Satan have a hold on your life and he is chewing you in his mouth like a lion devours a zebra.

The struggle is real and it's very personal to you. Your sin is something that you struggle with throughout your whole life. The sin of others against you and how you deal with it is real too as is the sin of those whom you love, and you see them heading down the path to hell. Both groups in this reading from Luke were called to repentance and a circumcision of the heart. They needed what only the Lord works and gives. They needed the Shepherd to seek

them out with same zeal of the woman turning her home upside down trying to find the lost coins. They needed salvation found only in Jesus. You need this too.

As a Christian you are called to examine your life according to God's law. The *Small Catechism* speaks to this in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief Part, Confession and Absolution, when Luther writes, "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?" See what God demands and requires of you. See how God instructs you to live your life where you are in the church, in your family, and in society. Examine your life and repent where you have failed. Repent where you have neglected and been lazy, and repent of any indifference or cowardly way that has caused you to avoid what God says to you and confess the faith faithfully. Repent and cry out to God for mercy.

Micah was right. Jesus Christ laid aside his glory, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father and his law, suffered on the cross, died, was buried, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God. This was and is for you. Because of this, God looks at you and says, "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 no repentance." You are found in Jesus. He has sought you out and brought you into eternal life.

So too Jesus says, "I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In heaven, the angels of God rejoice in your repentance that God has worked in you. They rejoice in your turning from sin and delighting in the new life given to you in Christ. The angels rejoice over your friends, neighbors, and loved ones when they repent and cling to Christ.

God rejoices in repentance. God rejoices in what was lost being found and the dead being made alive. God's delight is in your salvation and the salvation of the whole world. He has gone to great lengths in order to bring you to himself and he has called you his own. There is joy in this because there is great joy in these words that God says to you today, "Your sin is forgiven. You have eternal life."

There is also great joy that you have as the people of God when the Gospel is preached and sinners turn from their sins. There is great joy when someone who was lost is found by Christ. There is great joy when you see a baby baptized and his sins are washed away. There is great joy when you confess your sin here and the pastor speaks to you the words of Absolution. There is great joy when you kneel at this rail with those who confess the same faith you do and you receive the body and blood of Christ for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is the fellowship that you have as the Body of Christ, the Church. All this salvation of Christ is given out in this place and it spills out into your daily lives as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, grandparents, siblings, friends, and wherever you are. This is the boldness to speak the truth in love and the compassion to forgive each other's sins as you are forgiven. The compassion of God is the compassion of the Father in the Prodigal Son and this same compassion is lived in your lives as his sons and daughters.

"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." What comforting words to hear this morning. These are more than mere words, this is who your God is and how he treats you in Christ. This is what you have in Jesus. God's righteous anger toward you is satisfied in Christ. Your iniquities are trodden underfoot by him who crushed the serpent's head on the cross. Your sins are cast into the depths of the sea by him who commands the wind and the waves and they obey him. Who is a God like this? There is none other except him. This is your God, Jesus Christ, your Savior. Rejoice in your Lord for your God, the saints, and all his angels are rejoicing with you now and forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.