

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

LISTENING FOR JOY

Luke 15:1-10

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

1Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' 3So he told them this parable: 4'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." 7Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. The Parable of the Lost Coin

8Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9When 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." 10Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

DIAGNOSIS: Without Joy

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Grumbling and Disparaging*

There is long precedent for the grumbling behavior of the Pharisees and scribes. It reaches back to their ancestors who grumbled in the desert (over manna, over endless journeys). And it reaches forward into our own time where scowls are seen and grumbles are heard, in the voices of our grumbling world, even in our own. There is a method to this madness. That method is our sense of pride and pretence, our arrogant superiority, maybe even our sense of fairness. Things, and most especially people, do not measure up to the standards, even the best of standards (and the religious elite—scribes, pastors, those with special-standing in churches—often know those God-ordained standards best). But this pretense is self-righteous, meaning that we excuse ourselves from the measurement. The assumption is that we are not to be disparaged, only those who do not measure up. So we continue in this grumbling measurement of life. It's a joyless task, but someone has to do it, right? Don't think your grumbling goes unnoticed—not even by friends, spouses, children, parents, fellow parishioners, or coworkers. They may even join you in the grumbling.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *No Hearing, No Joy*

What certainly cannot be heard by the grumblers is their own grumbling. Nor can they hear the voice of Jesus. He, in fact, is one about whom the disparaging grumblers may grumble the most, and precisely because of his seeming inclusivity. They grumble because he welcomes known sinners to sit with him, to eat with him, to be part of his company. There is no distance here, no divisions; and so it would seem to the grumblers, no standards.

Au contraire! For Jesus will speak of repentance, often more-so than even the idea of true repentance (turning around and heading back to the Source) will come to the hearts of the grumblers who prefer to stay in the safe-zone of their self-righteous places. What can be heard in their voices is that there is no joy, no happiness. In fact, what is deafening in the joylessness of the grumblers is their inability to hear even God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Excluded, Lost*

Yet God will not fail to have God's voice heard. God will voice judgment—completely, fairly, equitably. On that day when the judgment is heard, it will hold all up to the Final Standards of the Law. One thing is certain: we will not like the measurements. But then, the sound of our own grumbling will be silenced by the words of that final judgment: You are lost.

PROGNOSIS: Surprised by Joy

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Welcomed (Included)*

Finding the lost, though, is the truly new method of Jesus in the madness of our grumbling world. He comes looking for them, as a shepherd seeks out one lost sheep, as a woman pursues her lost silver coin. Even when utilitarian standards might lead one to count one's losses and move on, Jesus searches recklessly for the one who is lost. That means going where the lost are, not staying in the safe zone. For Jesus, this will mean looking for the lost on the cross—where he will find us all in his own abandonment. But there, also, he will rejoice in that here God finds us and cherishes us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Listening, Joyous*

Because of this careful search, that finds us in all our lostness, we turn (repent) our ears and hearts to Jesus. No

matter how lost we have become, his company is with us. He lifts us up on his shoulder, because we are found and are to him precious. Imagine the surprise of the wayward sheep or the dirty, dusty, tarnished coin? They know joy because they have joy showered upon them, not only by Jesus, but by all his celebrating neighbors—even the angels of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Spreading the Joy Around*

Our own laughter gives away the joy of it all—even to all our neighbors (friends, spouses, children, parents, parishioners, coworkers). Heard over all the darkness at every corner of the world, or even a house, is the sound of this celebratory yelp of joy: “Rejoice with me!” Grumblers beware! This new breed of laughing and celebrating people of Jesus will finally be heard over all the dimness of doom. Before you know it, you may find yourself smiling and laughing along. How outrageously and wonderfully contagious that new joy in Jesus can be!