

**Pentecost 14**  
**15/9/2019**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28**

**Psalm 14**

**1 Timothy 1:12-17**

**Luke 15:1-10**

**The lost sheep and the lost coin**

Sermon preached by Andrew Gador-Whyte

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God loved the world in this way, that he sought us, his lost sheep, at the risk of losing everything else.

God loved the world in this way, that he turned up the whole house for the sake of a single coin, that he pursues what adds nothing to him so that he may share with us in his unreasonable joy.

God loved the world in this way – that in Jesus he called us his friends and neighbours so that our lives might become a feast over what only God recognised as infinitely valuable.

God loves – which is to say, God's will is oriented freely towards the other, embracing what he has made in its own integrity. God searches relentlessly for us in our alienation from one another and from him. God seeks us out in our weakness, our brokenness. God desires to embrace each person, incorporating each back into the communion that has been lost.

God desires us freely. God reaches out to our broken humanity in mercy. The form of God's mercy, revealed in Jesus, is solidarity. God's solidarity with us is an invitation to us to respond. Our response of love that his solidarity makes possible is repentance.

In today's reading from Luke's gospel, Jesus tells two parables to those who object to his fellowship with sinners. God has arrived, and welcomes money launderers with his surprising joy. And for others whose sin is to judge swindlers who are coming to trust God, he welcomes them too to share in his joy. Let nothing stand in the way of God's grace – neither our despair of God's mercy for ourselves, nor our attempts to manage others' relationship to God's mercy.

Jesus' familiarity with those alienated from God's people is not a cheapening of God's righteousness. Rather, it is to reveal the righteousness of God over and against the righteousness that we place in the way of our neighbour's healing.

In eating with sinners, Jesus makes communion possible not by toleration, but rather by solidarity. Not by denying what has ruptured our relationships, but by inviting us to one table. There we recognise the unity that comes from another, that judges our ruptured state. There we recognise the unity that impels us into the distinctly unglamorous work of asking and giving forgiveness, perhaps of giving up the need to be right that so pervades our culture.

Repentance is opening ourselves to God's healing judgement. It is allowing God to meet us where we are, in love. And it is the recognition of how much we have attempted to live independent of his love. Repentance is allowing ourselves to have our feet washed by Christ. It is coming to receive our neighbour's imperfect service as pure gift.

The Church is a repentant community. Repentance is the pattern of life Christ has given us. Like a bell ordering the hours of our work and prayer together, repentance is to be what structures our life, a constant invitation. Living together in the Church is taking God on trust that his mercy is always at work restoring our relationships, turning our will towards him, through what is ordinary and mundane and real. Liturgically speaking, repentance looks a lot like simply turning up, simply sticking with the rhythm of the Word, simply opening your hands to the gift that transforms us.

Repentance is standing in the line to the table of our common need, receiving forgiveness on behalf of our neighbour and for our own dire need. It is a life of prayer that refuses to despair of the mercy of God.

In baptism we have been given to one another as a forgiven people. To be washed is to be immersed again in the reality of a broken world, but to know it afresh as the place that has become the place of our healing. To be sanctified is to be drawn under the waves together where one has gone before us, with us, on our behalf.

To say that we are a forgiven people it is not to claim that sin is behind us in the streets outside. It is to say that we are given to each other in the particular awareness of having been met by the risen Christ. When he greeted us in the garden, his risen presence made visible our complicity in our neighbour's betrayal. And yet, even before his presence is judgement, it is, above all else, reconciliation. His risen life, revealed to us with the wounds we have dealt him, is above all an assurance of our incorporation with our neighbour into the resurrection life we share.

On the cross, Jesus himself has become the lost sheep and the lost coin. On the cross, we who were lost have been found by God. We who have been met by the risen Christ have come to recognise our implication in his betrayal and death. We have come to see that in Jesus, God has become the outcast, the accursed. God has identified with us in our alienation, in the brokenness of our relationships, in the failure of trust in which we are enmeshed. God has made his mercy known by sharing our life in Jesus, by eating with us, by solidarity.

Through fellowship with him, we have received the gift of a life lived in complete trust in God. The joy of growing into absolute dependence on God. The joy of becoming slaves to the love of Jesus Christ. The joy of recognising our neighbours and ourselves as forgiven sinners. The joy of connecting others with the love of God, the God who searches unrelentingly to restore people to life and communion.

Through fellowship with him, we have received that paradoxical joy of coming to see with clarity how our lives have been marked so comprehensively by fear, by evasion of responsibility to our neighbour, by avoidance of dependence on our neighbour. That paradoxical joy of repentance.

God loved the world in this way, that in Christ he searched in the wilderness, swept all the rooms of his house until he found us. He has searched us out, even to the point of meeting us at the depth of our weakness and alienation. However lost we are, we will be found in Jesus Christ. And he calls us his friends and neighbours, that our lives might become lives of joy for the lost whom he carries home. Amen.

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