

**Notes: Sunday September 15, 2019**  
**Scriptures: Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51; 1 Tim 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-32.**

**Theme: When we repent and return to God, God rejoices.**

**1. Summary:** Here we have three parables in which something was rescued, found, or came back. In each case we can see that God rejoices. We are then, also, called to remember that our God is a God who is full of mercy and forgiveness.

**2. Summary of the Readings:**

**Exodus 32:7-14.** The story of the Golden calf. In today's passage Moses is imploring God to have mercy on the sinful people who have abandoned Him and turned to idol-worship. In the verses immediately preceding our reading, Aaron responds to the people's clamor for an idol and makes the golden calf for them to worship.

Several points:

1. God is angry. "Let me alone... that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them..."
2. Aaron is never described as praying to God. Hence he is controlled by the people, not God.
3. God tells Moses that he is going to destroy the people for their sins but make Moses great.
4. Moses intercedes for the people and God relented of the punishment he had threatened.
5. Moses then corrects the people, grinds up the golden calf and makes the people drink it in water. I wonder if God was just testing Moses, to see if he really cared for his people? Then God rejoices when Moses steps into the breach and intercedes for the people.

**3. Second Reading:** Here St. Paul expresses gratitude for God's mercy.

St. Paul describes himself before coming to Christ as the greatest of all sinners, but in ignorance. That God could choose to use him was an act of great mercy, of great forgiveness (see Acts 8:1).

St. Paul is aware that he could have been terribly condemned for his persecution of Christ. St Paul is more like the lost sheep than the prodigal son. He did not return voluntarily; God went out and got him.

**4. Luke 15. With whom was Jesus speaking in this chapter?**

There are two groups. One was listening with much faith and much attention (tax collectors and sinners). The other was listening and watching only in order to criticize Jesus (scribes and Pharisees). Why? "Because he welcomes sinners and eats with them."

**5. What was the attitude of Jesus toward sinners (v.7, 10).**

I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."

In contrast, in the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had a saying, "There will be great joy in heaven for a sinner who is annihilated (destroyed)." They literally prayed for the destruction of sinners, like those who came to Jesus.

**6. There are three parts to this chapter:**

1. The lost sheep
2. The lost coin
3. The prodigal son or the parable of the two brothers.

The first two represent things that are incapable of thinking and responding for themselves. Here God, or someone else, must take initiative, frequently using us in our ministries to reach out. In the case of the lost sheep a foolish animal has got itself lost and needs to be rescued. In the case of the

lost coin, it is an inanimate object that he been lost and needs to be found. In the case of the lost son, “prodigal”, he had to “come to his senses”, recognize himself as a sinner and return to the Father.

**7. In all three cases we can see that “God” rejoices;** when the coin is found after a search; when the lost sheep is rescued, and when the lost son comes to his senses.

How important it is to realize that when someone who is lost repents and comes back to God, God rejoices. Jesus says the same thing after the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin:

“I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.”

“In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

**8. And in the parable of the lost son, the Father’s joy is made evident in the story itself.** We can see that the Father gave the son his freedom, even to his own destruction. But the Father was waiting, watching for that son to come to his senses, to repent, and to come home. And he did.

When he saw his son, the Father was filled with compassion and ran to meet him and kissed him. He then heard his son’s confession but immediately forgave him and restored him. First, the son said,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”

But then the Father responded, restoring his son.

“But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found. Then the celebration began.’”

The older son was angry and saw the Father’s mercy as unjust. But his father told him:

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.”

**9. Let us think a bit more deeply about this.** There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance! Notice the cutting humor in this from Jesus. Who before Jesus could claim that he is righteous and has no need of repentance? No one. Do you think that they got it? But this is good news for us. First, to remember that God is merciful and will forgive us if we humble ourselves and confess our sins, desiring to repent of them. But second, our repentance and return to God make him rejoice!

**10. How beautiful to know that God will rejoice over our repentance,** our coming home, especially if we might have done something deeply wrong, very embarrassing, something we would never have wanted to do. Sometimes we can feel utterly stupid, totally embarrassed. We would rather just disappear and hide. But that return to God, and that return to those we have hurt, being sorry and repentant, provokes joy in heaven. If it provokes joy in heaven, should it not provoke joy in us?

