

Sermon for June 21st, 2026
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 7:18-20

- 18** 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.
- 19** 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.
- 20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.

Psalm 103:1-13

- 1** Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
- 2** Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
- 3** who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
- 4** who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5** who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6** The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7** He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8** The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9** He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10** He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12** as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
- 13** As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” **3** So he told them this parable: **4** “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? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** 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.’ **7** 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. **8** “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? **9** 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.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Savior's Personality

When we think about the personality of Jesus, a few things come to mind pretty quickly when we read from this passage and the rest of the Gospels. He is compassionate, loving, zealous, and He always knows exactly what to say. Jesus isn't afraid to speak harsh truths, but He always offers His hand of fellowship to whoever would repent. From years and years of being a carpenter, we know that He is not above hard manual labor; from all the times He is shown going off to pray or relaxing at someone's house, He also knows how to *rest*. He is accessible to anyone who wants to speak with Him. The Scriptures point to Jesus as God, and they also point to Him as *fully Man*, with a three-dimensional personality. We do not have a “cardboard cutout” sort of Savior, but a true *Person* that we can get to know as we read the Gospels and pray to Him.

There is another aspect to His personality though, one that most people either don't know about or don't like to talk about. You see my friends, Jesus really doesn't like being told what to do. We never see Him submitting to human authority, whether it is from the Jewish synagogue rulers or from civic authority. Being Divine, He is always aware in the Gospels that man's authority is absolutely *nothing* compared to His, and though He never sinfully rebelled against parent or civic ruler,¹ He still had a kind of self-will and acted with complete freedom. Even when it came to taxes, St. Matthew records that when tax collectors demanded money from Him, He had St. Peter go catch a fish with money in its mouth instead of paying it out of pocket.²

1 Luke 2:41-51

2 Matthew 17:24-27

In his 1533 sermon on our reading, Luther puts it this way:

Now Christ is also a little self-willed and shows here that he is simply not to be dictated to by any one, and that he will be free in all things, as we see also everywhere in the Gospel, that a peculiar firmness or self-will is found in this man, who is nevertheless at other times so mild a man, willing and ready to help, the like of whom was never found on earth. But when they came to him with laws and wanted to be his teachers, then all friendship was at an end, he starts and bounds back, as when you strike on an anvil, and he speaks and does just the contrary they demand of him, although they even say rightly and well, and have God's word for it, as they do here where they come and say: You should do thus, you should hold to the society of good people and not to sinners. This is a precious doctrine taken out of the Scriptures; for Moses himself writes that they should avoid the wicked, and put away evil from among them. They have the text on their side, and come trolling with their Moses, and want to bind him and rule him by their laws.³

The Pharisaic Impulse

The Pharisees were always trying to flex their institutional muscles on Jesus, especially with their interpretations of the Mosaic Law. They were skilled at taking a *good* command and turning it into an overbearing parody of itself. In this case they twisted the command to be intolerant of evil company⁴ into something that meant all sinners themselves should be avoided. They did the same thing with their neurotic Sabbath regulations,⁵ hand-washing rules that aren't even in the Scriptures,⁶ and so much more. Here in our reading though, we see one of their worst distortions. If you took their refusal to speak with sinners seriously enough, you end up with a flat refusal to even speak with Gentiles – the very people that ancient Israel was supposed to be witnessing to: lo and behold, as St. Peter says in the book of Acts, such a regulation was actually proclaimed among the Jews on account of this neurosis.⁷

At first, the Pharisee school of thought was intended to help people be zealous for the Law, building fences of "oral tradition" rules around the real commandments so that people would be too bogged down obeying the former to violate the latter. To bar the people from associating with tax collectors and sinners meant they were kept from being tempted by household idols, intermarriage with pagans, false prophecies – all sorts of things that were prohibited by Moses. By the time we get to the first century though, all these additional rules became a vehicle for corruption. Enslaving the people to so many needling regulations, the Pharisees became a vicious cabal of oppressors who leached money, time, and honor from the people they were supposed to help.

They grumble against Jesus for flaunting their rules. They are horrified that someone dares to stand up to their prestigious traditions, scared that the people will all follow suit. Note here, the text shows us that they care nothing for the people Jesus speaks with. They do not try to win back the tax collector, nor do they convince the sinner to repent. In their minds, such people were *beneath* them because they made one command into an excuse to break another: in avoiding bad company, they taught themselves to hate their neighbor.

Christ's Response

Jesus is having none of their nonsense. He responds with two Parables, each with the same meaning, to lay emphasis on His point. A man who suffers the loss of his sheep will go find it, and he

3 “Sermons of Martin Luther – Third Sunday after Trinity,” found in *God Rules*.
https://godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_d7.htm

4 Deuteronomy 13:5b, “you shall purge the evil person from your midst.”

5 Luke 14:1-6

6 Mark 7:1-7

7 Acts 10:28

will rejoice when he gets the sheep back. A woman who loses a tenth of her money will celebrate when she finds it again. If the Pharisees and scribes can understand why someone would seek after a lost sheep or coin, why wouldn't they understand that God wants lost sinners to come back to Him? For that matter, here Christ castigates the Pharisees for their absurd belief that a sheep is more valuable than a human being.

Furthermore, our Savior attacks their exaggerated understanding of the Law. Oh yes, Moses instructed the people to purge the evil from among them, but if they are being shown the way of righteousness then how is that a violation? Turn an evil man from his way and he will no longer be the evil that should be purged. The prophets all did this very thing, witnessing both gently and harshly to the children of Israel and Judah; sometimes they stood by a wicked king as a kind witness to the righteousness of our Lord,⁸ other times they were persecuted for shouting the truth.⁹ How then, could these men judge Jesus for lovingly calling these tax collectors and sinners and showing them a better way? It is as if His Parables were a way of saying “You say I am receiving sinners. But I am not just receiving them, I am *saving* them, and Heaven rejoices to see it!”

Our Savior has, as Luther says, a kind of self-will. But this was not out of some sinful rebellious streak or a hard heart. Christ is not “stiff-necked” as Moses describes rebellious Israel.¹⁰ He flaunted their man-made traditions because He was doing more than the Law could ever ask. Moses says to not keep bad company; Jesus takes a step further by turning bad company into good company. Moses says the Sabbath is a day of rest; Christ goes further by *giving* people rest on the Sabbath and healing their wounds. His expression of freedom, modeling Christian freedom for us, shows that to live freely and justified before God results in doing far more good than the Law could ever ask.

Conclusion

For the believer, one who is justified by faith in Christ, the Law does not apply. Oh it is still there, and we rejoice to have the Ten Commandments as our tutor and guide, but it does not oppress or terrify us. If I work on Sunday to serve my family or cook dinner so my wife can relax, that is no sin. If I approach “bad company” with the witness of Christ crucified for their sins, I have done no wrong. This is not permission to *sin*, but rather an endorsement of cheerful good works and love for our neighbor. And let us not forget that all of us at one point were just like the lost sheep or the lost coin. If anyone should come to you with some overbearing command to do something that the Bible does not ask us to do, all you have to say is “I am already justified by my Savior and Heaven rejoices. I have no need of your tradition nor your rules.” And let your heart be at peace.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

8 Isaiah 8

9 Jeremiah 38

10 Exodus 33:3