

## Throwaway Children Luke 15:1-10

Our Gospel lesson today contrast the tax collectors and sinners with the Pharisees and Scribes. The tax collectors and sinners represent all that is bad with humanity. These were the bad guys, they colluded with the Romans and they were greedy for worldly good. They represent personal immorality and religious non-observance.

On the other hand, the Pharisees and Scribes represented everything good. They had personal integrity, they were constant in their religious observances and they maintained a good community standing. They were the good guys and had no use for the bad guys. They didn't wish them ill, they just wished them gone.

Jesus had offended the good guys with his association with the bad guys. Now, it was OK to do business with the bad guys if absolutely necessary, but NOT OK to mix with them socially. NOT OK to be on a first name basis – NOT OK to have dinner with them. And definitely NOT OK to suggest you might approve of their behavior. When Jesus shared a table with them, he brought them in too close for comfort.

The good guys looked down their noses and said, he welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus responded with two parables that reminded the Pharisees and Scribes of God's love and God's joy and a sinner's repentance. He raised the possibility that the good guys might not be quite so good after all if they did not love as God loves and celebrate and God celebrates.

Jesus did not say it, but of the great heroes and heroines of our faith have been sinners. Moses sinned against God and God denied him entry into the Promised Land. David was "chief among sinners", to use the phrase that Paul later used to

describe himself. David had a thousand wives and then seduced Bathsheba and killed her husband.

The Pharisees and Scribes were also sinners, they were equally lost, they had just wandered away by a different road. The Pharisees didn't see to think that their sins were all that serious. After all, the Pharisees were the pillars of the temple – they were the ones who upheld the high standards of the community.

The Scribes were the teachers, they taught the people of Israel the religious laws that Israel should live by. They didn't understand that they were sinners too, they certainly didn't understand that their sins were just as serious as anyone else's – after all they had no use for the people like tax collectors and prostitutes.

We as a church are always tempted to make the same error, to sin the same sin, tempted to despise the despicable, to refuse God's love to the unlovely. We become tempted to ride our high horse and look down our noses at others.

So, Jesus tells some stories about some sheep and some coins, now these stories weren't really about sheep and coins – they were really stories about God's love. He put words into the shepherd's mouth, really into God's mouth, **“Rejoice with me, for I found my sheep that was lost.”** Just as the shepherd rejoices when he finds the lost sheep, God rejoices when a sinner – any sinner repents.

Jesus also put words into the woman's mouth, once again really God's mouth, **“Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.”** Jesus goes on to make the point, **“there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents.”**

So shame on you Pharisees and Scribes! Shame on us too when we too easily accept the lostness of people in society. When we see lostness, but no longer care, we just write them off as hopeless.

While I was working on this sermon, I heard a news story about “throw away” children. I had heard those words before and I thought I knew what they meant. So I did some research and found that a “throw away” child is one no longer wanted

by the parent or parents. A run away child leaves home on their own a throw away child is forced out by their parents.

In some cases, the parent will literally throw away the child. I came across several stories of parents throwing children into rivers, dumpsters and other horrible places.

The one story that stuck out to me was about Khandi Busby. She threw her two sons, aged 6 and 8 years old off an overpass into traffic and then jumped herself. Investigators later tried to determine what had happened and why – they thought the mother may have been mentally ill. One of her cousins said “I didn’t think she had mental problems, but she had anger issues.”

Throw away children – can anything be more tragic.

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin make clear that our heavenly Father has no throw away children. Every tax collector and sinner is precious to God, he grieves at their lostness and rejoices when they repent.

Every alcoholic and addict is precious to God. God grieves at their lostness and rejoices when they finally break the chains that bind them. Every bigot and person whose heart is filled with hate is precious to God – he grieves at their lostness and rejoices when they repent of their bigotry and anger. Every mugger and murderer is precious to God, he grieves at their lostness and rejoices when they repent.

You and I are precious to God. God grieves when we sin and rejoices when we repent. The stories of Jesus on the cross and at an open tomb remind us that God has no throw away children, we are all precious to God – no matter what we have done. God weeps for us when we are lost and invites all the angels in heaven to a celebration when we repent.

There might be someone here this morning or someone that you or I might know who thinks – that isn’t for me. There is no hope for me, I have sinned so terribly, I can never be forgiven. THAT IS NOT TRUE!!

If there ever was anyone who was hopeless, it could have been the men who crucified Jesus. Jesus did not damn them – He prayed “**Father forgive them.**” If God can forgive a man who stuck a spear into Jesus’ side – God can forgive you or me. God wants to forgive you and me. When you repent of your sin(s), God will not only take you in but will throw a great party to celebrate that you have been found.

But, we, the church need to be careful to not be led into complacency by these parables. They tell us that God can and will forgive any sin. They DO NOT tell us that sin is not important.

We as a church are sometimes tempted to not take sin seriously. After all, we live in a “Different strokes for different strokes” world. Some people have begun to think that there is no such thing as sin. We are tempted to avoid condemning sins that our culture has blessed such as greed or money sins or power sins.

We are tempted to sit at the table with sinners, not to lead them to repentance but to prove that we have an open mind. BUT, Jesus did not say “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner “ and leave it at that. Jesus said, “**There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**” It is our repentance that brings God joy.

Jesus invites us to love sinners into repentance. He then invites us to the celebration “**Rejoice with me!**” he says. “Come to the party! You are the honored guest! Come and celebrate!

Come and experience what it means to be forgiven – and to be loved.