

## **Two Audiences**

Scripture: Luke 15:1 – 10

In our scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus frames two parables for two audiences. One audience – the Pharisees who are out on the fringe sneering at Jesus for the bad company he was keeping at the table. Second audience – the sinners or the ‘bad’ company with whom Jesus was sitting down with for a meal.

In verse 3, we are informed that Jesus told the parables of the ‘Lost Sheep’ and the ‘Lost Coin’ but we do not know which audience Jesus intended it for – the tax collectors and sinners at the table or the eye rolling and snippy Pharisees outside of the house?

Well, it is probably for both of them and yet it is instructive to wonder how differently these parables sounded in the ears of those two groups. They both heard Jesus’ words but they interpreted them so differently!

Let us first look at how the ‘bad company’ heard the two parables. To them, the parables must have been great stories because they needed a reminder that they were the ones God needed to seek out and find. These two parables of the ‘Lost Sheep’ and the ‘Lost Coin’ must have touched the sinners’ souls and made them feel very happy.

They surely must have thought of themselves as the lost sheep or coin. They must have rejoiced that the shepherd would leave the 99 to find the lost sheep. They must have rejoiced that the woman would search high and low for the one lost coin. I can see the faces of the ‘bad company’ smiling ear to ear upon hearing these two parables.

And yet, the 'bad company' must have been looking over their shoulders at the faces of the Pharisees who are looking through the window. The faces of the Pharisees were faces with a scolding frown upon them. The Pharisees never failed to signal a message to the folks they called sinners with a distaining frown. These sinners were not their kind of people and the Pharisees always let them know that!

The Pharisees believed that the bad company Jesus was keeping were not God's people. The Pharisees thought the bad company Jesus was keeping were lost to God! So if you fit into the category of a lost cause, nothing was going to save you!

But then they heard Jesus tell these parables about how God is the champion of the lost and the bad company must have felt like good news was upon them!

How often I feel like the 'bad company'. I am sure each of you feel the same way! To us the parables are great stories because we need to be reminded that we are the ones God seeks out. These two parables of the 'Lost Sheep' and the 'Lost Coin' should touch our souls and make us feel good.

How often do we think of ourselves as the lost sheep or coin? We need to rejoice that the good shepherd would leave the 99 to find us, the lost sheep. We must rejoice that God will search high and low for us, the one lost coin. I hope your faces, the faces of the 'bad company' are smiling ear to ear upon hearing these two parables.

Often the world will look over its shoulder at us with a scolding frown upon their face. The world will send us a message with a distaining frown. The world believes that the bad company that follows Jesus are not to be trusted. The world thinks the bad company that follows Jesus are lost! We fit into the category of the bad company!

But then we have heard Jesus tell these parables about how God is the champion of the lost and the bad company. It must feel like good news for us!

The second audience for these parables is the Pharisees who are stand outside of the dinner party and I am sure these parables sound rather different in their ears. In the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin joy breaks out all over the place except with the Pharisees.

There is no mistaking the fact that such divine joy is getting aimed at Jesus' bad company and not the Pharisees. But in the end, there is no way the Pharisees missed recognizing themselves as the 99 sheep or the 9 coins. Do not miss the point here – each audience had ears to hear but only one audience rejoiced at the parables.

I wonder sometimes which set of ears we have? I wonder what set of ears we hear with? I wonder what set of ears the church hears with today?

Does the Gospel sound wonderful to us only when we see ourselves as the target of God's grace? Does the Gospel speak to us only when we are the target of God's joy and happiness? Or does it sound best to us when we see others getting caught up in the divine embrace, even though the divine embrace is for others who are very unlike us?

And can we feel joy over the salvation of others different than us because we know that when you get right down to it, we are all the same?

If we stop and think about it in terms of 'us versus them', maybe we will never have just one set of ears; maybe we will never have just one audience?

But let us hope that our ears hear these parables with ears that are highly adapted at picking out the tune of sheer joy that is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

My friends, in my teenage years I became a lost sheep. I was voted by my high school friends – Most likely to die in a riot! I was a rebellious teen and, in many ways, I was lost! Then the Good Shepherd found me. He left the 99 and sought out the one – ME!

Are you lost? The Good Shepherd is seeking you out!

Have you been found? Then let us rejoice and welcome the lost ones back home!

Let us pray:

Lord, we want to be those that hear your word and obey. We want to be in the audience that responds to your call to serve others. Let this be so!

And if we ever wonder away from you and deny our faith in you, forgive us and call us back home with you. AMEN.

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