The gospel reading for today will be coming from the 15th chapter of Luke. This chapter in Luke has 3 parables that Jesus tells of something being lost and something being found. There is joy and there is resentment throughout these parables.

We begin by reading the first 3 verses of the chapter. As we read this part, pay attention to who is coming to listen and who is feeling uncomfortable with the types of people that Jesus is choosing to hang out with.

**Read Luke 15:1-3**

The tax collectors and the so called “sinners” are coming near to Jesus and listening to him. Luke begins this story by sharing this crucial point that it’s the people on the margins that are finding themselves drawn into Jesus. It is not the elite that are being drawn to Jesus but those who feel looked down upon.

But as the tax collectors and sinners come to Jesus, the well to do and religiously connected are beginning to feel uncomfortable. The Pharisees and the scribes begin to grumble. The religiously well off are grumbling that Jesus not only welcomes those kinds of people but that Jesus even eats with them. Resentment begins to take hold.

Luke then shares two parables. In one parable, a shepherd is responsible for 100 sheep. But one sheep goes missing. Jesus asks, which one of you if you had 100 sheep and one went missing would not go in search of the one that was missing?

In this story, the shepherd continues to search and search until the one lost sheep is found. When the one lost sheep is found there is great rejoicing over the finding of one lost sheep.

Luke then quotes Jesus sharing another parable. In this parable, a woman has 10 coins. One of the coins becomes lost. Jesus asks, will not this woman search and search and search until the one lost coin is found? That is what she does.

After searching and searching and searching until the coin is found, this woman, like the shepherd, expresses great joy. In fact, she reaches out to her friends and invites them over for a party because the one that was lost has been found.

In these first 2 parables, there is only joy when the lost object is found. The joy leads to celebration and parties. But when we move to the third parable found in the 15th chapter of Luke, we find that the lost being found sometimes leads to resentment.

**Read Luke 15:11-32** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xONjlDWyJ8>

The question as we look at this parable is where do we see ourselves in this story? Which character do we identify with in this parable? Do we find ourselves drawn to the younger son? The one that is usually identified as the prodigal son. Are we the one in this story that has gone off and done some things in our life that we are not too proud of doing?

Are we the one who has had responsibility entrusted to us and we abused that trust in some way? Maybe you had access to some money entrusted to you that you spent in ways that was not ethical. Maybe you have taken advantage of someone’s trust in you and been unfaithful to that trust in some way.

Maybe you have been shortsighted in the way that you have lived your life and now you find yourself broke and not sure which direction to turn. Maybe you can relate to the youngest son in this story.

Or maybe you can relate to the father in this story. Maybe you are the one who has had your trust taken advantage of by someone else. Maybe you feel like a sucker. Maybe you feel manipulated by someone that you trusted.

Maybe you feel like the father who has seen a trusted child, friend, spouse, partner, or friend go off and waste their life and you have no idea what has become of them. You are scared and you do not know if this person will ever return into your life or find some sense of being found.

Or maybe you can relate to the eldest son in this story. Maybe you are the one who has been trustworthy. Maybe you are the one who has played by the rules and done all the right things but yet someone else has gone off and wasted what they have been given.

Maybe you feel unappreciated for the way you have lived your life while the irresponsible one is the who gets all the attention. Maybe you are the one that has been passed over for a promotion while the person whom you helped is the one that got the promotion over you. And that sucks.

If we examine our lives, my hunch is that at different times in our lives we can relate to all three of these characters. Sometimes we are the person who has done some things that we regret and that we wish we could do over. Sometimes we are the one who feels taken advantage of. And sometimes we feel like we are the one who has done all the right things, and no one is throwing us a party.

If we examine all three of these characters in this story, we find one emotion in common. Resentment. All three of these characters feels resentment at some point in this story. The father faces the resentment of having half of his estate wasted away. The text doesn’t say that, but you know he feels it. He worked hard for what he earned and now it is gone for good.

The youngest son feels resentment that he never fit in to his family like his older brother did. The older brother adopted the family rules and has lived within them. The younger son, however, always has felt as though he was the outsider. Until finally he says the heck with it, and he goes off to do his own thing.

But the clearest resentment that we find in this story rests in the eldest son. He has done all the right things but yet he feels taken advantage of. No party has ever been given for him. This brother of his who has wasted so much gets a party, but he gets nothing. Life is not fair.

Some people call this story the parable of the prodigal son. Some may want to call it the parable of the loser who gets a party. I say loser but if you catch me in a one on one conversation, I would probably use a different word than loser.

The reality is that all of this resentment in this story originates in one simple fact. All this resentment originates because of God’s lavish love. This is a parable that at its core is about a God who chooses to love us no matter what.

God’s lavish love is greater than any disobedience that we ever do. God’s lavish love is greater than any love that we think we have earned. God’s lavish love is greater than any amount of love and acceptance that we can give.

So, the question for us is this. What do we do with our resentment? Or maybe the bigger question for us is this. Why do we remain resentful? According to this parable, resentment only keeps us outside sulking while the party goes on inside.

We can choose to hold on to our resentment. We can let this resentment fester in us for a long time. We can self-righteously affirm that we can hold onto this resentment. We can make that choice to remain resentful of someone else that may be a brother, sister, parent, spouse, friend, or child.

Or we can seek to accept the reality that God’s love is greater than anything else. Greater than our own mistakes. Greater than the mistakes of others. God’s love is always greater.

So today we are invited to lay aside our resentment. Lay aside our resentment and allow ourselves to be invited into the party and celebrate. Celebrate that what was lost has been found.

When you give up the resentment that you have toward someone else, you may just discover that the one who was lost was actually you. AMEN.

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-Given: March 31, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)