

Sermon Luke 15 13 11 32 4th Sunday in Lent series C

Sermon: 4th Sunday in Lent Series C

Text: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Theme: God cares of each of us

Goal: To show God's care to individuals, assuring His personal care and love to each of us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: This parable is the third one of a series of three: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son. Jesus told these three parables as a reaction to the muttering of some church leaders because Jesus was welcoming sinners in His group and was eating with them. These parables are at the same time teachings about God's concern for individuals, not just for humankind in a general sense, but for each of us, one by one. The first parable talks about a flock of one hundred sheep, highlighting the one that was lost. The second parable talks about ten coins, highlighting the one that was lost. And the third parable talks about *two* brothers, highlighting the one who got lost, - but not forgetting the love of the father to the one who was always with him at home. Try to put yourself into the parable: If we performed a drama based on it, what would be your role?

I – God cares of individuals

The African bible Commentary (p.1234) says: *As individuals we are each valued by God. Each of us is a unique being because of the dignity and value that God has conferred upon us. Nobody should regard herself or himself as low, useless, rotten and unproductive. And because each of us is unique, it matters deeply when one of us is lost. The loss of one is as serious as the loss of all. Therefore, we have to stick together. The fact that we belong to each other and are related*

as brothers and sisters is what makes us human. Because each of us is so precious, we must also constantly be searching for ways to guarantee that no human life will be lost, degraded, exploited, abused or violated.

When I read this, I visualized St. Thomas: We are such a nice congregation, a big family. But how far do our concerns go about those who are going astray? Do we have the same compassion and love as God has for the lost?

II – Our concerns about our brothers and sisters in Christ

We live in a time of strong individualism. People want their rights to be respected, and we lock ourselves inside our walls. Even myself as pastor am sometimes afraid to ask you about your personal feeling, health and other issues; I don't want to invade your private life. We come together at the services and at some other functions of the church, but after this each goes to his/her house and nobody knows about our challenges, happiness or problems. Sometimes we are ashamed to share them, or people are not interested to listen to us.

We have some brothers and sisters who are going astray. Some haven't come to our fellowship for a long time; some come just sometimes.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law used to criticize those who were not living 100% according to their laws. And they criticized Jesus as well as He approached those people and accepted them in His circle of friends. They didn't have any concern or love for the lost. Therefore Jesus told these parables. The Pharisees were like the older son. But even the older son was loved by his father, who tried to bring him in to feast with the one who was lost and now is found, who was dead and now is alive again.

III – God’s compassion.

The father’s compassion is so big that he didn’t question the lost son who came back what had happened, what he did with his inheritance, or whatever more. The father was so happy to receive his son back alive, that the only thing he wanted to do was to have a feast and celebrate!

We can imagine his broken hearth while the son was far. He loved his two sons. One was with him at home. The other one was far: no news, no contact... is he still alive? - Have you ever faced such a situation in your family? The concerns are mixed with anger: Why is he/she doing this?

God has lots of reasons to ask each of us, “Why are you doing this and that?” In a general sense, we all were or are the lost son. Because of our sins, we were all living far from God’s house and from His family. Paul says: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). God in His grace receives every one of us back every day by the sake of Christ. God has enough reasons to condemn us because of our daily sins, but He doesn’t take pleasure in condemnation. His heart wants to save all. And He accepts us. Paul wrote about the reconciliation God did through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-21); and Psalm 32 says: “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered”. (Readings for today).

Jesus showed in this parable that God wants to save all, the so called “big sinners” and even the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who were always criticizing Jesus. Jesus was very hard and harsh with them several times. But in this story Jesus uses another strategy to touch their consciences and their hearts. He said that the father went out to talk with the older brother. He listened patiently to the son’s complaints. He understood that the older son was upset

because the younger one had spent all the money in a wild style of life. He understood that he was jealous because the father had organised such a big feast for his “sinful” brother. After listening to the arguments of his son, we can imagine that the father put his arm over the shoulder of the son and said to him: “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

It doesn't matter what had happened. The guy was alive and came back home, humbled and repented. He had to have another chance!

Conclusion: I know that several of us have concerns about children, family, relatives, friends and church's brothers and sisters who are far from God's house. What can we do but pray and wait for them? The father from our story didn't even know where his son was or if he was alive at all. But his heart was full of compassion and love. And he didn't wait in vain. His hope was rewarded and he got his son back.

When God brings someone back to his house, a visitor or a former member, let's welcome and embrace him/her with love. Our behaviour cannot be like the older brother, but has to be like the father, who rejoiced and welcomed the lost son. We have to remember that God once threw His gracious arms around us and kissed us as well when we were baptized, accepting us sinners in His Christian family. Some of you were welcomed by God not as a child, but at a later age. We have to rejoice with the angels in heaven for each one who repents and comes back to the Father! “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 10 March 2013