

Sermon: 3rd Sunday after Trinity

Text: Luke 15: 1-10 (v.1): “Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were gathering around Jesus to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

Theme: Jesus welcomes sinners

Goal: To assure Jesus’ love for all, to forgive and to save all.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have a proverb in Portuguese that says: *Dize-me com quem tu andas, e eu te direi quem tu és*. This means: *Tell me what kind of friends you have) and I will tell you who you are*.

- I found a old proverb in English that has a similar meaning: *He who sleeps with dogs arises with fleas*.

This can be observed every day in the schools, when groups with certain affinity come together; in our work place, where people with the same interest come together; and even here in the church, when young couples come together during coffee time, the seniors, as well as some ladies, the youth, the children, some German or Afrikaans speaking people; when some Brazilians come I and my wife are with them... forming small groups.

Nothing wrong that far. But what about when we think about gangs, like drug gangs, robber gangs, drunker gangs... Would we like to see our children mixed with them? Or would we approach them and join them? The matter is becoming complicated... After all, we are good people and we have a family and a name to preserve...

I - Who are the ‘sinners’ of our text?

This is the challenge faced by Jesus in our text. He has been accused by the Pharisees of mixing Himself with sinners, and

even of eating with them. What kind of man was this? Was He the chief of the sinners? Who are the 'sinners' of our text?

One category of 'sinners' is mentioned explicitly: The tax collectors. They were Jews working for the foreign oppressing Roman government, usually exploiting their own people collecting more taxes than the rate and saving this extra money in their own pockets. We call this *corruption* nowadays. Among the tax collectors, we know the name of two: Matthew, who was called to be a disciple; and Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector from Jericho. But many other tax collectors came to listen to Jesus.

We also have some women among those so called 'sinners': Mary Magdalene, who had seven evil spirits; and Jesus expelled them from her (Luke 8:2). The adulterer woman, to whom Jesus said: I do not condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin (John 8:11). And many others who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases.

Jesus is gathering lots of people around Him and not many of them are the right sort of people. At Jesus' feet sit the outcasts ... These people who know they have completely messed up their lives. They hang on every word that Jesus says. He has welcomed them into His fellowship. For them the really good news is that God is happy to see them. The Jewish culture (and I think our culture too) was really good at telling them that they did not belong to God's people. Jesus tells them that God is happy to see them; the heavens rejoice at your presence, the angels are happy, God is happy. (Phil Brandt, pp. 44,45).

Does this mean that Jesus was supporting their sins? That Jesus, mixing with them, was giving a bad example and would be contaminated by their wrong behavior? This is not the case. Jesus was not supporting their sins, but He was trying to get them out from their wrong way, so that they would follow Him

and have a new life. And this happened with many of those 'sinners' who approached Jesus to listen to them. They repented from their sins and became a new creature, a child of God, trusting in Jesus and following Him. They are part of the "outcast people" we mentioned in our last sermon and who were invited to the great banquet prepared by the Lord.

A question that we can raise from this text: Are we among the sinners who are looking for Jesus' help? Or are we among the Pharisees, who don't want to mix with this kind of people and criticize Jesus' attitude?

II – Jesus made Himself "sin" for us

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:21, 20).

Jesus was born without sin, and He didn't sin all His life. What happened is what Prophet Isaiah wrote: "Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). Everything Jesus did and suffered was on our behalf. Therefore, He mixed Himself with sinners to bring them back to God's fellowship and family.

Remarkable is when Jesus was baptized. People came to confess their sins and to be baptized by John for the forgiveness of their sins. And who came among the people, among the sinners, to be baptized as well? Jesus! He put Himself among the sinners! John didn't want to baptize Him, because John knew that he was without sin and that He didn't need forgiveness. But Jesus replied: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all

righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was always among the sinners to call them to repentance and to faith, to save them. And what is more, He died on the cross between two robbers. And even there, one of them repented and was forgiven, receiving the promise of eternal life. This was the goal of Jesus when He mixed Himself with those considered by the established church as "sinners" and "outcasts": To bring them out from their sins and to give them new life.

This is still Jesus' goal when he works through the church. He searches for the lost sheep and for the lost coin till He finds the lost. He rejoices when the Prodigal Son comes back home and He accepts him back into the fellowship of His family. Are we ready to be Jesus' arms to hug with love those who come back repented? Remember that we are still sinners too, and that God comes to our aid and offers and gives forgiveness in the Absolution and at the Lord's Table to all who believe. We cannot have the same attitude of judgment against others like the Pharisees had.

Conclusion: Imagine being one of the sinners at Jesus' feet when you hear this. Hurray! Heaven rejoices that I am here right now. - But imagine also being one of the Pharisees who hears that. They are standing on the edge of the scene angry and scowling. They are not happy... (Phil Brandt, p.47). The parable ends with Jesus standing there, holding His hand out to these guys, asking them to come and sit down beside these same tax collectors and sinners. In so doing, Jesus is offering to the Pharisees the hospitality they do not deserve just as much as the sinners at His feet do not deserve it. All of us are saved by grace. (Phil Brandt, p. 51,52).

He delights in forgiving people. This is hard for us. We get tired of someone who says that he or she will do better but never does.

*We imagine that God must be tired of my repeated confessions.
But He is not. He is never tired of forgiving me. (Phil Brandt, p. 55). Amen.*

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 02 July 2017