In the Gospel lesson that we just read from *Luke*, Jesus was found once again hanging out with a group of tax collectors and other “sinners”. And as expected, the Pharisees and the scribes were keeping a vigilant eye on him, of every word he spoke and every move he made. These Pharisees and scribes were the self-proclaimed righteous ones, who were quick to judgement in condemning others, for the violation of the religious law, while neglected to identify their own. Certainly Jesus was not exempt from their scrutiny. They were grumbling and accusing Jesus of “inviting the sinners and eating with them.” But you think that Jesus knew what he was doing and whom he was dealing with?

 Being an opportunist, Jesus turned this incident into a teaching moment concerning God’s kingdom that’s already here and is yet to come. This was still a rather novel concept for them to realize. What does this “new” kingdom of God look like? Who belongs there? Who’s in and who’s out? Jesus knew this was NOT going to be easy, anticipating a great deal of resistance and opposition, especially among those who were stubborn in their hearts and reluctant to make changes in their lives.

 Through a series of parables dealing with the lost sheep, the lost coin, and finally the lost son here in Luke 15, Jesus illustrated to us an important lesson concerning God’s extended grace and reconciliation, and what our roles may be. He challenged his followers then (and to us today) how we ought to relate to one another, especially those who may have fallen astray, or have gone down the spiraling wayward path. Many of them might be in dire hope and desperate need. But they couldn’t dig themselves out of the hole, as they were eagerly waiting for someone to rescue them.

Jesus was intending these parables not for the scribes and the Pharisees, but those who were marginalized and ostracized from the community – the tax-collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners, who do not quite “fit” in our society. Those were the lost sheep and the pennies that were dropped on the ground that no one wants to pick up. The emphasis of these “Lost & Found” parables was to demonstrate God’s love and mercy upon the repenting sinners. Jesus was saying that it’s more worthy to spend time saving the One who expresses remorse and desire to repent, than the other 99 who do not.

Just as we talked about in our message last week, even the potter could turn a lump of spoiled clay, full of defects and flaws, refurbish it and turn that into something that’s beautiful, pleasing to the creator, and fulfilling its purpose for good use. In the same way, God is willing to give his people a 2nd chance to redeem themselves, if they awaken their senses through their repentance and confession.

**Jesus came NOT for those who are spiritually healthy but for those who are weak and suffering, but yearning for the truth in God’s saving grace.** He came to rescue those who were lost and needed to be found. Jesus reached out to those who may be crying out in their silence. Time after time, the people have spoken and God has heard their cries. As Jesus proclaimed, **“*surely there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Furthermore, as we read these “lost & found” parables, we tend to focus more on the One who was being lost, but what about the other 99? We tend to forget about them. Is it fair for them that they’re not getting the attention that they deserve as well, while risking their welfare in order to save that just ONE? But I think we can find some commonality here and that there is a corporate component of these parables as well. The rest of the 99 do play an important role in the rescue and reconciliation of the 1.

When the shepherd found that one lost sheep, what did he do? He called together ALL of his friends and neighbors in the village, and he threw a party. Yes, he threw a party even just for the one who has been lost but now found. As he said to all of his invited friends and neighbors, **“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”[[2]](#footnote-2)** He wanted others to come and celebrate with him.

As the Apostle Paul reminded us that “*if one member suffers, we all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

I think there is something beautiful and wholistic when a community endures through a crisis and works itself out together. Like in any relationship, we need one another mutually in order to accomplish great things. As Jesus described in these parables, the community comes together and celebrates the one who has been lost but now found. The community had become whole once again. The missing link has been restored.

 As one theologian put it so well, he said, in our brokenness we may shamefully find our way standing before God seeking forgiveness. This is the journey of God’s salvation and amazing rescue in our lives “*Our seeking of God’s grace when we are lost is but our willingness to be found”.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

 Earlier this week, our country paused in moments of silence to commemorate the 18th Anniversary of 9/11. This tragic event has undoubtedly shaken us, traumatized us, and offered a whole new perspective of how we relate to one another (for better and for worse). Through this horrific event, we’ve seen the darkest and the brightest days that followed. We saw how this country laid down our differences by coming together as one people in overcoming our adversities and challenges. We’ve proven that we CAN put our political and personal agenda aside in lending support and healing to one another. We rejoiced and celebrated whenever someone was being rescued out of the fallen rubble, while bearing in mind that probably there were probably other more who might be buried underneath…definitely more than 99. We saved the ONE while we could!

 On one hand, the nation may appear to be more united and strengthened in the midst of a national crisis, but on the other hand, it unveiled a whole new face of human fears, bias, and stereotypes against those who may look or sound “different” from us.

 18 years may seem like a blink of our eyes or a blip on God’s radar. There have been much healing and progress made, yet there are still much hatred and division cast across humanity, both domestically and globally. Humanity are still confronting one another, engaging in warfare and threatening the innocents who came under the crossfires. Many are still living in fears, even among us today…fear of being arrested, deported, or attacked simply for being who they are…simply because they look different from the others.

 This week, one of my friends opened an art gallery exhibition out in Chelsea in Manhattan. The theme of the exhibition was “*Alone Together*”. The artist focused his work upon *“breaking down the walls we put around ourselves and the boxes we put others in. We recognize that in our differences there is strength. In our uniqueness is commonality. We strive to live in a world where we not only recognize and extol our differences, but celebrate them. That through creativity we all share our most potent power – our humanity. Together we rise.”*

 The human race is in a state of spiritual brokenness that is desperately in need of healing. Too many are still at lost not only physically, but spiritually and emotionally as well. Too many of the innocence are still suffering at the hands of human exploitation and power.

 As Christians we have an important obligation to fulfill as God’s transforming agents and ambassadors to this world. God has commissioned us to seek out those who are still being trapped and buried underneath these spiritual and emotional rubbles. We rejoice together when one who may be lost but is now found. We pray that one day, they too may be rescued…and that there will be a party waiting for them just as well.

 The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin both conclude by calling together of friends and neighbors to join in the celebration[[5]](#footnote-5). Invitation to this Heavenly celebration is NOT based upon one’s merits, qualifications, or accomplishments but rather upon God’s grace and mercy. This invitation is opened to anyone who embraces it.

 God grants us grace to repent and allows us the opportunities to be found. The ultimate celebration or the feast will not take place until ALL the lost have been found. As one theologian put it, “***True repentance happens when our minds are changed to such a degree that we cannot see a community as whole until all are included and found, and none are “lost”****.[[6]](#footnote-6)*

 It is my prayer that God will continue to help us embrace those who may be lost and need to be found, for we too have once been lost. Pray that God may enable us to build bridges, to amend these broken relationships, so that one day there will be a feast for the party of ONE…ONE people, ONE family, and ONE God, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

In the name of God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 15:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 15:6* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *1 Corinthians 12:26*  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bader-Saye, Scott *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4 P.70* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bader-Saye Scott *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4 P.72* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nixon, G. Penny *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4 P.73* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)