

TODAY JESUS TELLS US ANOTHER PARABLE. LAST SUNDAY HE GAVE US THE STORY OF THE TAX COLLECTOR AND THE PHARISEE. NOW JESUS TELLS US OF THE FATHER AND HIS TWO SONS, ONE OF WHOM GIVES THE NAME TO THIS SUNDAY: OF THE PRODIGAL SON. IT IS A FAMILIAR STORY YET THE CHURCH GIVES IT TO US EVERY YEAR BECAUSE WE NEED TO HEAR THE WORDS OF JESUS OFTEN AND REPEATEDLY, EVEN THE SAME PARABLE. WE FORGET, WE GET CAUGHT UP IN THE WORRIES OF THIS LIFE, WE GET MIRED IN OUR SINS. JESUS'S LIGHT IS GIVEN TO US ANEW IN THE HOLY GOSPEL TO DISPEL THE DARKNESS IN OUR HEARTS, TO OPEN UP TO US WHAT TRULY MATTERS IN LIFE.

JESUS GIVES US THIS PARABLE TO TELL US THAT EVERY PERSON MATTERS TO HIM. EVERYONE COUNTS. THERE IS NO PERSON WHO ESCAPES HIS WATCHFULNESS, NONE WHO IS OUTSIDE OF HIS CARE. JESUS, IN THE TEN VERSES BEFORE THIS PARABLE, SPEAKS OF THE ONE SHEEP OUT OF ONE HUNDRED THAT HAS GONE ASTRAY.

HE TELLS HOW THE SHEPHERD LOSES HIS HEAD TO GO IN SEARCH OF THIS ONE AND DOES NOT RETURN UNTIL HE HAS IT SECURE ON HIS SHOULDERS AND THEN HE CALLS FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS TO REJOICE OVER FINDING THIS ONE LOST SHEEP. JESUS ALSO TELLS OF THE WOMAN WHO HAS TEN SILVER COINS AND, LOSING BUT ONE COIN, SHE SEARCHES THROUGH THE HOUSE TO FIND IT. AND WHEN SHE FINDS IT SHE CALLS EVERYONE TOGETHER TO TELL THEM THE GOOD NEWS THAT SHE HAS FOUND THE COIN THAT WAS LOST. JESUS CONCLUDES SAYING “JUST SO, I TELL YOU, THERE IS JOY BEFORE THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS.” (LUKE 15:10)

ONLY AFTER TELLING THESE DOES THE LORD TELL THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON. THE LOVING FATHER WHO GIVES IN TO THE DISRESPECTFUL REQUEST OF HIS YOUNGER SON. THE YOUNGER SON WHO PROCEEDS TO LEAVE HIS FATHER’S HOUSE TO A FAR-OFF COUNTRY AND WASTES EVERYTHING HIS FATHER GAVE HIM. FINALLY, AFTER BEING REDUCED TO ENVY OVER THE PIGS’ FOOD, HE CHANGES HIS HEART AND TURNS AGAIN TO HIS FATHER’S HOUSE.

ON THE WAY, HE SAYS OVER AND OVER IN HIS MIND WHAT HE WILL SAY TO HIS FATHER, HOW HE HAS DISGRACED HIMSELF, AND HOW HE WILL BEG TO BE RECEIVED AS A HIRED SERVANT.

BUT WHAT DOES THE FATHER DO? LIKE THE SHEPHERD WHO LOST ONE SHEEP OUT OF ONE HUNDRED AND THE WOMAN WHO LOST ONE SILVER COIN OUT OF TEN, THE FATHER LOSES HIS HEAD AND COMES RUNNING, RUNNING, TO HIS SON TO RECEIVE HIM. AND NOT ONLY WELCOME HIM HOME BUT CLOTHES HIM IN HIS BEST ROBE, A RING ON HIS FINGER, SHOES ON HIS FEET. HE SLAYS THE FATTED CALF TO REJOICE THAT HIS SON WHO WAS DEAD IS NOW ALIVE IN HIS FATHER'S OWN HOUSE.

EVERYONE DOES REJOICE. EVERYONE EXCEPT THE OLDER SON. THE OLDER SON WHO DID ALL HE WAS EVER ASKED AND RESENTS HOW HIS FATHER TREATS THE PRODIGAL WHO HAS RETURNED. AS HE DID WITH HIS YOUNGER SON, THE FATHER DOESN'T WAIT FOR HIS OLDER SON TO COME TO HIM. THE FATHER GOES OUTSIDE TO HIM TO PLEAD WITH HIM TO COME INTO THE FEAST.

THE FATHER REMINDS HIM THAT ALL THE FATHER HAS BELONGS TO HIM, TOO, AND THAT HE HAD TO REJOICE BECAUSE THE ONE WHO WAS LOST: THE SHEEP, THE COIN, THE SON, HAS BEEN FOUND. AND THERE IS JUST SUCH "JOY BEFORE THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS."

(LUKE 15:10)

THE SHEPHERD, THE WOMAN, THE FATHER ARE THE LORD GOD. AND WE, BELOVED, WE ARE THAT ONE LOST SHEEP, THE ONE LOST COIN, THE ONE LOST SON, WHOM THE LORD SEEKS OUT TO THE POINT OF HIS OWN DEATH ON THE CROSS. SEEING HOW HE LOSES HIS HEAD FOR US, SUCH LOVE TO SEEK US OUT EVEN WHEN WE TURN OUR BACK ON HIM, DOES THIS NOT CALL TO OUR HEARTS "REPENT"? IT IS THIS, REALIZING WHO GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE, THAT WILL LEAD US LIKE THE PRODIGAL TO LIVE A LIFE OF REPENTANCE, AWARE OF OUR SINS AND AT THE SAME TIME AWARE THAT TO THE LORD EACH ONE OF US, EACH PERSON, MEANS EVERYTHING TO HIM. LET OUR PATH THROUGH LENT, THROUGH LIFE, BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST JESUS WHO LOSES HIMSELF IN ORDER THAT WE PRODIGALS MAY BE FOUND.