



“Joy in Heaven!”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Luke 15:1-10

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Sermon:

I don't talk much about individual sin, especially not "the seven deadly sins" of Christian history.

Do you recall them? [pride](#), [greed](#), [lust](#), [envy](#), [gluttony](#), [wrath](#) and [sloth](#),

They began to be listed back in the 300's of the Common Era, for the edification and warning of desert monks and nuns, living on the edges of society, seeking God, spurning an easy life.

But they had eight sins, not seven!

Our lists have omitted the sin called "acedia"...

What, you ask is acedia?

Well, it shouldn't really surprise you that the understanding has evolved over the last 1700 years or so, right? It got lumped in with "sloth" over the years.

But I recently was reminded of it again, in one of our UCC Daily Devotional emails.

Acedia is also known as: the "noonday demon". That sense of tiredness, and apathy towards, whatever you are doing, that gets you in the middle of your day.

Acedia: that dreary feeling that whatever good work you are trying to do, it is worthless, it is unsatisfying, it is insignificant and unimportant. And so are you.

Acedia: feels like a modern sin if ever there was one. A sin custom-designed for the overwhelming work of social workers, therapists, activists; teachers and civil servants of any town, country or state. A sin for pastors.

And the key to acedia's importance in that list of infamous sins: the discouragement and tiredness of acedia lead one to *give up*.

For the early monks and nuns, the temptation was to give up, leave the harsh life there in the desert and go home again. Where, for one thing, it was cool and comfortable in the middle of the day, and you could take a nap!

Acedia: defined as the sin of "tiredness from doing good in work or prayer". Acedia: the sin of being overwhelmed and discouraged enough to quit doing the good you have been doing, because, well, because it is too exhausting. And, I might add, because you see so little result, there is so little progress; the enormous problems, the great big barriers, are still there, the next day and the next and the next.

Acedia: the sin of giving up on doing good.

And what does this have to do with today's reading?

The shepherd did not give up.

The woman sweeping her house did not give up.

There is always at least one sheep that is lost.

There is always one precious coin that is lost.

Always.

Jesus suggests that we never give up on them. Because in heaven, there is joy even over that one lost one being found.

One commentary I studied this week suggested that the celebration of the lost sheep was so great because, generally speaking, that sheep was not likely to be found at all, or just bits of it would be found. The predators, and the dangers were so great...from jackals, to lions, to cliffs and crannies that would break a leg or break a neck...these dangers were so great that finding the sheep alive was a wonderful surprise. So heck yeah, the shepherd called his friends to celebrate the safe recovery of his sheep with him!

Jesus suggests, that we still go hunt for that lost one. Do not stop seeking the lost one.

And, celebrate, when someone lost, is found again. Heaven does, he tells us.

- Celebrate one lost person, found and on the road to recovery.
- Celebrate, one lost runaway teen, found and placed with loving caring people.
- Celebrate, one lost bitter person, found taking the risk to love and be loved again.
- Celebrate, one LGBTQ+ child or youth, found in a community of Christian love and support, and not hurting themselves, or hating themselves.

My friends, there is this, too: sooner or later, I believe we will all be the lost one.

At one time or another, no matter how well adjusted or healthy you are...you will find yourself lost.

Lost and alone, and in danger. Spiritual danger, or physical danger, in danger for your heart turning to stone, in danger from your cynicism overcoming your kindness, in danger from giving up on humanity, or giving up on a relationship, or giving up on the future.

We all become lost.

And we need to believe that not only is God seeking us, even out in the dangerous wilderness of our loneliness, anger or despair; speaking to us in the silence of the night, in the desperation of our suffering...

But
God also sends shepherds, and determined women...to seek us out, and find us when we are lost.

And place us back where we belong; in the center of a celebration of our being!

The shepherd goes out for that lost sheep.
The woman seeks through her entire house for that lost coin.

They do not stop until they find it. They do not listen to the sin of acedia, telling them it just isn't worth it. "Go home, take a nap, give it up".
Instead, when they have found their treasured one, they call everyone to celebrate with them.

Whether it is a celebration in a classroom, a therapist's office, a church, a home...there is joy in the shepherd, joy in the determined woman, and yes, joy in the sheep, too!

There is joy, Jesus declares! Joy at being found. Joy at finding and restoring the lost one. Joy in God's heart, joy in every heart.

Where God is, where Jesus' lives...there is joy, "on earth, as it is in heaven".

For every one of us, EVERY SINGLE ONE, there is God's joy.

Halleluia! Amen.