

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This Sunday we hear three parables or stories that describe life in God's Kingdom. And they also tell us something incredibly important about God. Each one describes the act of finding what was lost—a shepherd who finds his lost sheep; a woman who finds her lost coin; a father who welcomes home his lost son. Jesus uses each of them to show that God rejoices when anyone who is lost comes back to him. God is described in joyous human terms, as one who celebrates the return of all who have lost their way.

There are always two basic questions about God. First, does God exist? Lots of people debate this, discuss this and write about it. If you are reading this right now, you probably stand with those who truly believe that God exists. Second, What is God like? Is God like a tyrant? Like an indifferent bystander? Like a stranger to us? Or, maybe he is just an impersonal force that supports the natural laws of the universe? How do the three parables told by Jesus answer the question: What is God really like?

A Gospel Word for the Home

Luke 15:1-32

First, God is like a loving shepherd who cares so much about each individual sheep, he will momentarily forget about those that are safe and seek out the one who is missing. Loving parents experience this kind of love. God is also like a woman who really counts her pennies and when one is missing, she will do almost anything to find it. She treasures every single one of her possessions. God is like both the good shepherd and the concerned woman.

But God is mostly like the father who sees his wayward son in the distance, the same son who squandered half of the father's wealth and is now returning with his tail between his legs. He is contrite to be sure, but mostly he is ashamed. In justice he should be put back to work to earn what he foolishly and selfishly lost. But now comes the surprise. The father so loves his son that he sets aside the son's bad behavior and instead throws a magnificent party for his son who has returned. My, how much that father loved his son! My, how much God loves us!

Parent Survival

The parables of the Gospel this week are wonderful to read and difficult to implement. All of them go beyond what might be called "common sense." The shepherd leaves 99% of his sheep, risking their survival. The woman ignores and even risks losing 90% of her wealth as she focuses on that one lost coin. And the father who fully loved his lost son risks losing the love and respect of his faithful son. On one level, these parables are a bit crazy!

But is that not part of deep parental love? It does not count the cost. It does not simply think of practical outcomes. It squanders love on behalf of children—even into their adult lives. Is this healthy? Is it the right Christian thing to do? I think we have to reflect on the love of the forgiving father for this one. But the answer definitely goes beyond a simple: do what is just.

Car or Meal Talk

The story of the Prodigal Son is one of the most memorable parables of Jesus. Read it with your family and ask for each one's opinion about the message of this parable.

One-Line Prayer

Loving Father, help us to love each other as you love us. Amen.