Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 51:1).

Rom 14:7-12; Luke 15:1-10

“It was observed by those whose business it is to know that Jesus was out late again last night, seen in the bars drinking and cavorting with some of the worst kinds of people. You know who I mean. Ordinary people seem to love him -- charlatan that he is -– preaching holiness by day and boozing it up with gangsters and their women at night. No upstanding pastor would be seen dead with him. And as clever as he is, this Jesus of Nazareth is nothing but a hillbilly preacher in the big city who is in over his head and on his way down.”

The three parables of mercy Jesus tells in Luke 15 were addressed to his critics, the good people of his day who took scandal at his “preferential love” for outcasts and sinners. The stories have an element of extravagance that gets our attention. “What shepherd among you having 100 sheep would not leave the 99 to go in search of one lost sheep?” What shepherd indeed! No sensible shepherd would do what Jesus proposes. What is wrong with this picture?

Likewise, a woman who spends a whole day upending her house to find a single lost coin, then invites her neighbors to party with her when she finds it. Or, in the final parable of mercy we call the “Prodigal Son,” (not included in today’s passage from Luke) a proud father abused by an impudent and selfish son still longs for his return and restores him with honor. Who would act like this?

Jesus acts like this by going out in search for those who are lost. Moreover, he says, God, the ultimate arbiter of good and evil, the basis for all morality, reward and punishment, does the same. Jesus’ parables of mercy are meant to move the self-righteous not just to show mercy to their wayward brothers and sisters, but to be open themselves to that the same unconditional love being offered to them, who have become so distant from God because of their pride and intolerance.

There is no concession to sin here by Jesus. He is after people who are sick and dying, inviting them to come home to God and the community, to leave their addictions and destructive ways behind them. This is why he came, to bring people to life. Only love can do that, and what better way to offer it than to go where it is most needed?

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