

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Jesus and Irrational Love”

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Sometimes the Church offers us a longer version and shorter version of the Gospel reading, this Sunday is one of those times. The longer version of the Gospel reading has the story of the Prodigal Son; however, we covered this parable last Lent. If you are interested in a homily on the Prodigal Son, you can find it on my website under “Year C”. In contrast to the Gospel reading we had in Lent, this Sunday also has a couple parables leading up to the story of the Prodigal Son that I want to focus on instead since we have the opportunity. I love these parables because they demonstrate clearly that Jesus had a great sense of humor. The humor can be lost on us these days because we live in different times, so let me help you with why these parables are both funny and yet profoundly helpful at the same time.

Jesus is being accused of impropriety by the scribes and Pharisees because he liked visiting the houses of people they called “sinners and tax collectors”. And so, Jesus responds to them, “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?” It is a funny quip because the obvious answer to me is, none of them. No one would risk losing ninety-nine sheep in the desert to find a lost one. In my imagination, I can see Jesus telling this parable with a smile on his face because the story even gets more ridiculous. Jesus continues, “And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep’”. This seems even more outlandish because you are now at home with the lost sheep inviting the neighborhood to a celebration while presumably the ninety-nine other sheep of yours are still out there in the desert. The situation Jesus is describing feels intentionally ridiculous. The people listening to him would have been amused wondering, where is he going with this? The parable gives us an insight about God that is quite profound. Jesus says, answering his critics, “I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.”

Jesus isn’t finished with his critics yet because he seems like he has an even more ridiculous story for them. A woman loses a coin and spends all night sweeping the house trying to find it. When she does, she invites the neighborhood over for a celebration that would have cost a lot more in hospitality than the coin she lost. Again, the situation Jesus is describing is intentionally ridiculous, but again he is making a profound statement about God. Jesus says, “In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

What makes these parables so powerful? Consider the presumptions about God that the scribes and Pharisees were operating from and how Jesus corrects them. The presumption about God the scribes and Pharisees were operating from was one where if you associated with sinners who lived lives contrary to God’s will that God would be displeased with you as well. Jesus corrects them by articulating in an entertaining way how much God loves his people, especially those who stray, and that love is an irrational love by our standards. Or perhaps best articulated by St. John’s Gospel, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that those who

believe in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” The incarnation itself is God visiting the households of a whole world full of people in need of repentance. This is what makes Jesus’ critique of the scribes and Pharisees all the more entertaining. You don’t win souls for God with a finger wag from across the street. You don’t win souls for God from a place of arrogance or hubris either. You win souls for God from a starting place of irrational love. Love requires relationship.

This is a helpful message and critique of how we sinners typically operate. How often do we withhold love from others who don’t agree with us? The maxim we often default to is, if you don’t agree with me I cannot love you. That is the “woke” world we live in. If you do not agree with me, I will cancel you. This pervasive attitude in our culture today is toxic. This happens in families as well. When disagreements happen between family members, political or otherwise, how often does it end up with people shouting at each other, or worse, becoming estranged to each other. The parables Jesus is offering us this weekend point to God who will not cancel us. Jesus calls us to conversion, yes. Jesus calls us to embrace the truth of the Gospel, yes. However, Jesus does not cancel his people. In fact, he will go to the cross for us and for the sake of our salvation.

That is the point of our Gospel reading today. Who leaves ninety-nine sheep for a lost one? Nobody, except Jesus. Who throws a block party to celebrate finding a lost coin? Nobody, except Jesus. Who allows himself to be handed over and die for sinners? Nobody, except Jesus. Who has the power to save humanity from woke hatred? Nobody, except Jesus. How do we get there? We get there by speaking truth with love and that love is irrational. The love Jesus calls us to is, in fact, divine.

We can therefore ask ourselves this week, what are the arguments I am involved with at home, at work or in my world right now? Who are the people I have “canceled” in my life or who have canceled me, for whatever reason? What are the bitter resentments I am holding on to that just make me grumpier day in and day out. We can then ask ourselves how can I respond to these broken relationships in a truthful way with the irrational love that Jesus calls us to in the Gospel reading this weekend? Now imagine if our other family members did this. Imagine if every soul on our planet did this. How much better life would be?