

Luke 15:1-10

September 15, 2019

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

What brings us joy? What really makes us jump up and down with glee moving us to call our friends and family and rejoice with them? Perhaps, it is the birth of a son, daughter, niece, nephew, grandson or granddaughter. Maybe it's a wedding or a new job. Maybe it's graduating from high school or college. Perhaps, our favorite team winning the big game. Or maybe it's going on a vacation, buying a new home, celebrating an anniversary, or winning some money in the lottery. Or maybe it's doing well on a test or finally completely that homework assignment you had been putting off doing. Whatever it is, we all have those experiences that bring us great joy and lead us to talk about and share with those around us. God gave us the ability to respond joyfully to moments such as those above.

On Wednesday evenings, during faith formation classes, the children and youth gathered will often sing songs centered upon the theme of joy. Two of them we sing quite often. The first one opens with these words, "J-O-Y, down in my heart, deep, deep, down in my heart." The second one begins with these words, "Joy, Joy, Joy, all the joy, joy, joy, all the joy, joy, joy, all the jo-o-o-y --- "J" is for Jesus, "O" is for others, and "Y-ee-ee" is for you and you and you and you and you." What I like about these two songs is that in the first, the joy we have in our hearts - deep, deep down in our hearts is from Jesus who the songs goes on to state "put it there" and "nothing can destroy" that joy. The second song also emphasizes this joy is rooted in Jesus; however, also points out it is not solely ours to claim and experience - it is also for others.

Joy seems to permeate our gospel passage this morning. The incomparable joy of Creator for creature. The joyous party God throws when the Spirit's work transforms hearts reorienting them to the source of life and away from those things that fail to bring life. It is about the joy experienced by the saints when one who is lost is found by the shepherd who continually seeks – the woman who won't sleep until each table is unturned, each square inch of space is covered.

It's a crazy and ridiculous kind of joy we are invited into. After all, which one of us would really abandon 99 sheep leaving them in the wilderness unattended to go after the one that wandered away? And which one of us would set aside everything else going on in our lives to search for a lost coin and if we were fortunate to ever find it even give thought to throwing a party which would surely cost more than the coin? That really doesn't make a whole lot of sense does it? Yet, God is like that shepherd in search of one lost sheep Jesus said and God is like that woman desperately searching for one lost coin in the middle of night. And yes, God pulls out all the stops, Jesus says, in sharing that joy with others.

Sadly, I fear too many people fail to experience a God of joy and I dare say too many people often find it difficult to see the joy of God reflected in God's people. This passage caused me to look in the mirror and ask myself the question, "How have I shared that joy lately with others?" Too often, the church falls prey to Satan's snare of what the Apostle Paul deems works of the flesh such as idolatry, greed, jealousy, anger, quarrels and envy. These things snuff out the light of Christ's joy we are filled with causing the outside world to struggle to see the fruits of the Spirit: love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness and there's one more – JOY.

So, what kind of party do we want people to see when they enter this space – God's house? When they see us beyond the walls of this building? What message are we sending? Are we focused on the 99 or are we stewarding all we have in search of the one that is lost? Are we content to stay in bed and rest on our laurels or are we roused from our slumber because we just can't sleep until that one lost coin is found? Will we be known for our joy? Because we got it, "J-O-Y, down in our hearts, deep, deep, down in our hearts... ." Jesus put it there and nothing can destroy it. Let's share that joy with one another and with the world always in need of a dose of joy!