

'A STUDY IN JOY' - 11 SEPTEMBER 2016

Using the NRSV translation, Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel begins,

*'Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.
And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying,
"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."'*

We can pick up the grumbling of those criticising Jesus.

But what was Jesus feeling as tax collectors and sinners gathered to hear him?

Was he concerned? Happy? Troubled? Sad? Cheerful? Pensive?

How did he feel?

The next parables reveal what?

- The Lost Sheep
- The Lost Coin
- The Lost Son or the Father and Two Sons

Jesus knows that each person can be lost in different ways.

LOST SHEEP

Lost in the wilderness of life, and we stray.

Lost and needing someone to come and find us.

A true neighbour does **NOT** say,

"I'm too busy with the 99",

But finds the time to come and find me.

Lost, but for someone who cares, I am a priority.

LOST COIN

Lost at home. Familiar surroundings yet lost within.

Lost by being complacent or lacking gratitude; lacking courage to step out.

LOST SONS

The younger son is somewhat like the lost sheep, wandering.

Except that he makes a conscious decision to wander and get lost.

And he makes a conscious decision to return home.

And the father comes running to him.

He knows that he is secure with a place to live, a father to respect, a lifestyle with honour, an heir.

Yet lost in his jealousy, lost by his arrogance.

And the father leaves the party to come out to him in the fields.

Lost like the tax collectors and the sinners.

Jesus travels. He accepts hospitality.

Some reach out to him, some maybe curious, others maybe hopeful.

Mixed motives like the younger son who returns.

Wanting security.

Lost like the Pharisees and the scribes who might not know that they are lost.
Surrounded like the lost coin with the familiar, they can't see clearly that they need Jesus to find them, to save them.

Up to this point we hear about being lost for different reasons, and being found.
But what about how Jesus felt then and feels now for us.
Let us return to these Lost and Found parables

LOST SHEEP

Verse 5,

"And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices"

Verse 6,

"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' "

LOST COIN

Verse 9,

"When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' "

LOST SON or SONS

Younger Son

Verse 20,

"... But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion, he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. "

Verses 22-23,

*"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;
For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!
And they began to celebrate."*

Older Son

Verses 31-32,

*"Then the father said to him,
'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.
But we had to celebrate and rejoice,
Because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life;
He was lost and has been found.' "*

God **REJOICES** when we are found.

We pray for God to discover each day the lost parts of ourselves.

But of course, it is not just about us.

The father in the parable invites the slaves to prepare for the celebration of the lost son now found.

In the Greek translation, it says *δούλος* *doulous*, "slaves".

Some translations use "hired servants".

There is a call to humility.
They share in the father's joy.
And they begin to celebrate.

But we are not told the end of the parable.
After the father, rejoicing, comes out to invite the older son to rejoice and join the celebration, does he enter???

THE ENDING IS UP TO US

Do we join in the celebration of others being found?
Or do we stay away and sulk? And refuse to go in?

How are we similar to -

- the younger son, (the tax-collectors and sinners)?
- the older son, (the grumbling Pharisees and scribes)?
- the humble servants (the slaves working at the celebration)?
- the father (moved by compassion and joyful)?

How do we share this joy?

The selfish younger son who has returned and now graced by the father?

The angry older son who has to decide whether he will rejoice or not.

The humble servants who share the rejoicing, by their lives devoted to the father of the household?

Going back to the beginning of the Gospel passage, how does Jesus feel?

Joyful at the banquet of God's love.

Wanting others to share his joy of the good news.

The prophet Zephaniah in the Old Testament reminds us in chapter 3.

"The Lord, your God, is in your midst"

"He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;

He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival"

Humbly we are invited to enter into this incredible energy of God's joy.

Humbly to be inclusive of God and our neighbour, not to be exclusive.

Humbly to live our lives with an open heart, and not to be elitist.

To be people full of compassion and love, seeking justice and mercy.

To rejoice in God's love for all people.

To enter the dance and music of God's celebration.

To share in God's joy.

Let us pray and rejoice.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – 'A Study in Joy' – 11 September 2016]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/091116.cfm>]

[Strong's Concordance: <http://biblehub.com/greek/1401.htm>]