

Sermon Notes: Sept 11, 2022 **Focus:** Jesus loves the wrong people [Lectionary Readings](#)

I want to look at three related parables in Luke 15: Lost sheep, lost coins, and a lost son. The scripture reading today contains two of these (sheep and coins). The Scribes and Pharisees' criticisms were very Poor-Richard's-Almanac: "If you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas." The people listened to Jesus, but only nodded politely when the religious leaders spoke, which surely made the Scribes jealous.

Jesus seems to make a point of getting fleas with people he associated with and blessed with healing. Jesus is always dragging people who were deemed dirty into the center of righteousness. It's like he wanted the religious landscape of his day to be filled with vagabonds and former ne'er-do-well's. This three-parable-package in Chapter 15 - sheep, coins, and son - were Jesus' response to these criticisms.

Loving dirty-people-clean seems to be at the center of everything Jesus was doing on earth. All the listeners of his parables would probably have agreed with the punchline of the first two parables - sheep and coins – but scratched their heads on the last.

- a lost sheep:* of course, you seek the lost sheep out, any good rancher would.
- lost coins:* who wouldn't check the couch cushions for a hundred-dollar bill?
- The lost son:* Jesus goes too far: the father welcomes a wayward son, no way. How dare he enable bad behavior. (How dare he obliquely criticize the Scribes and Pharisees with this story). The lost son is not in today's reading but is essential to understand Jesus' response to criticism in Chapter 15.

Jesus was always redefining who was "in" and who was "out." This made him no friend of the establishment. Let me use three of my own "parables" in hopes of understanding how we can apply Jesus' ministry better and be counterculturally loving by way of legend, theater, and curb cuts:

1. The city of Rome's "pomerium" was the sacred perimeter around the eternal city to mark the boundary between profane and sacred. It marked a boundary between life and death.
2. I will share a scene from *Angels in America* to describe the great beyond. It is a vision of heaven you've probably never conjured in your mind.
3. I will survey some of the fruits of the disability movement, and how it has helped everyone from the lame to the leaping alike.

1st Pomerium According to the establishment of Rome legend, Romulus killed Remus and got busy excavating. Romulus ordered plows to groove out Rome's holy perimeter. The tradition of marking this border, the pomerium, was borrowed from the Etruscans. This border separated the chaotic area outer region filled with demons from the holy, strong, and sacred inside.

Christianity had a different view: death could be turned to life. The weak were strong. Over time, this 'heresy' took hold in Roman culture, and the dead were buried *inside* the perimeter; Catacombs were places of worship. That which was broken was strong. This all would have been a shock to old Roman sensibility where only youth and life were worshipped. [More detail](#)

2nd Angels in America (Heaven or Hell scene) When *Angels in America* came to the Alley Theater in Houston, it really stuck with me. Roy Cohn was a man dying of AIDS and was a very hateable person. Only at the end of his life did he begin to soften. The scene that I still remember was an interaction with his caregiver / angel in a hospital.

Roy Cohn: What's it like after...This misery ends?
Belize: Hell, or heaven? [*Roy indicates "Heaven" through a glance*]
Belize: Like San Francisco.
Roy Cohn: A city. Good. I was worried... it'd be a garden. I hate that s**t.
Belize: Mmmm. Big city. Overgrown with weeds, but flowering weeds. On every corner a wrecking crew and something new and crooked going up catty corner to that. Windows missing in every edifice like broken teeth, fierce gusts of gritty wind, and a gray high sky full of ravens.
Roy Cohn: Isaiah.
Belize: Prophet birds, Roy. Piles of trash, but lapidary like rubies and obsidian, and diamond-colored cowspit streamers in the wind. And voting booths.
Roy Cohn: And a dragon atop a golden horde.
Belize: And everyone in Balencia gowns with red corsages, and big dance palaces full of music and lights and racial impurity and gender confusion. And all the deities are creole, mulatto, brown as the mouths of rivers. Race, taste, and history finally overcome. And you ain't there.
Roy Cohn: And Heaven?
Belize: That was Heaven, Roy.

I don't think heaven will be San Francisco or necessarily dirty. But I do know it will be filled with mélange of everyone from the successful to the homeless; prostitutes to drug dealers; CEOs to janitors. Each will bring their own flavor to heaven, and it will be tasty indeed. It will be a place for people to shine with God's love however they know best.

3rd Disability helps everyone I suspect most of us think helping people with disabilities is a noble thing to do, but maybe unrealistic to help *every* disabled person. I want to suggest that helping people with disabilities helps us all. When we create a world where disability is less of an obstacle to living a full life, we all have a better world. Many accommodations that started for the disabled are now part of regular life that benefits everyone.

Electric Toothbrushes In 1954, the Broxodent electric toothbrush was created to help people with limited strength, mobility and control do a better job of brushing. Now, it's great for everyone.

OXO Good Grips Sam Farber saw his arthritic wife struggle with a potato peeler. The OXO brand with Good Grips was born. I won't buy a 1970's style can opener ever again.

Speech-to-text and Voice Recognition Apps "hey Siri" set timer for 10 minutes": you can thank the disability community for prompting this innovation.

Curb Cuts Originally for wheelchairs and after the 1990 ADA mandate they showed up everywhere. If you have ever pushed a stroller or ridden a bike, these cuts are mighty handy.

There are a lot more examples that affect everything we do, but I left them off for brevity.

3 Luke 15 parables and three Todd parables

Jesus was always bringing dirty people into God's presence. It was countercultural when he did it in Luke. It was countercultural when early Christians did it in the catacombs. It was countercultural when we reorganized society to be more accommodating to people with disabilities. It was countercultural when gay people were welcomed in the church. How can we be countercultural and bless the un-bless-able so that we are all stronger in faith?

Todd