

Prostitutes, Publicans, and Pharisees Cliff Sabroe

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." So He spoke this parable to them, saying: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:1-10).

We preach over and over that we need to “go into all the world and make disciples”. Many times, however, our idea of what is “all the world” is very limited. We will preach, but only to those who we want to be around. We talk to a nice educated middle class family, or to a single business woman, or to a well behaved college student, but not to the man sleeping on a bench in a park.

Jesus’ love for sinners knew no boundaries. Jesus went to the lowest of the low. During this time, the scribes and the Pharisees felt that those who had broken the religious and moral laws of Judaism were beyond the pale: they were to be excluded, ostracized and rejected; Jesus however did not! Luke tells us that, without condoning sin, Jesus welcomed sinners and offered them forgiveness and love, he gave them understanding and care. Like a magnet, he drew the most despised members of society towards himself and valued them and used His time with them as an opportunity to teach them the Words of Life. Jesus not only welcomed sinners when they came to him, Jesus also took the trouble to seek them out and meet them; “for the Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost”. No wonder that when the scribes and Pharisees saw Jesus in the company of such people they got very angry toward Him. Jesus would go on to correct this attitude with several parables about things that are lost.

What is our attitude toward the lost? Do we feel that some people are unworthy to hear the message? Do we sometimes think “that person will never obey”? Jesus went to, and saved those who most people would categorize as having no hope. We need to have the attitude of Jesus. We need to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matt. 22:39). Who is our neighbor? It may be the person strung out on dope, it may be the prostitute turning a trick, it may be that person in jail, it may be that happy couple walking their dog on a Saturday afternoon, it may be that preacher from that particular church by your house. No matter who it is, when a sinner turns from sin and to God, “there is joy in the presence of the angels...”.