

Title: "CNC" (Compassion & Celebration ..& Confession—not Computer Numerical Control)
Text: Luke 15:1-10 & 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Sermon:

Intro – Each of us has feared, at one point or another, that we have lost our keys, or our wallets or purses, or maybe a credit card an ID, or an address book. These small items are crucial to our life. We can't get by without them. **When we loose things** like these we scour the house, looking under the furniture, in all our drawers, and we retrace our steps. We may even clean out our cars and our bedrooms from top to bottom in order to find the items we lost. We often feel irresponsible and stupid when we lose one of those important every day items. Sometimes when we can't find what we lost after a day or two, we give up. Then it hit us: We realize that if someone else found our keys or wallet, they could abuse them and ruin our lives – we'd need to change our locks, cancel our credit cards, and get a new driver's license. Besides all that we'd be out the cash we lost. We need to replace or recover the items we lost just to get our life back on track.

In the parables Jesus told about the lost sheep and the lost coin. We identify with the shepherd and the woman, because they too had lost an everyday item that they really couldn't live without. Something simple that provided security and itself had value. If they had never found the sheep or the silver coin, they would also have been out a lot of time and energy, not to mention what their boss or wife or husband would have thought of them when they found out they had lost a sheep or a coin.

Scriptures tells us that when a person found a lost sheep or a lost coin, that it was normal for them to throw a party to celebrate. They would call their friends and neighbors together and throw a party. Wouldn't it be great to be invited to a party every time one of our neighbors lost their keys and found them again! We today, hear these parables and think – "You know, the shepherd had 99 other sheep and the woman had 9 other silver coins, what's the big deal. Why did they celebrate?" If *we* find our lost items, all most of us do is sigh with relief and laugh to ourselves about it. Those of us who are a little wild, may even do a little dance, but we definitely would not throw a party.

But I ask you, how does our reaction change when what we have lost is something more valuable, **We celebrate** a found wedding ring, a family heirloom or even a photograph of a loved one long since passed away. Both our sense of loss and our desire to celebrate increases four-fold. We turn our houses upside down looking

for the treasured item that reminds us of the people we love. We even spend hours digging through our attics, garages, and basements. We get so upset and so angry at ourselves for having misplaced these items. And when we can't find what we lost we become really very sad because they can't be replaced. Even when a lost ring replaced with a ring with a bigger diamond, the new ring still doesn't *really* replace the lost one. But if we do find that photograph of grandpa holding you as a baby or the earrings passed down from great-great grandma – do we want to throw a party? Yes, but we don't. Usually we only spend the energy to we call our close friends and family on the phone about and if we get a chance show off the item.

But you know, our keep-sakes, our photos, and our rings are just things. That's why we don't celebrate finding them – deep down we know that life isn't about things. Life is about people. The only things we usually spend the time and energy to celebrate are our friends and family. We celebrate births and birthdays, weddings and anniversaries. We celebrate graduations and new jobs. The most special celebrations are when a family member comes home from a tour of duty over seas, or when we celebrate a recovery from a tragic accident or serious medical condition. The happiest celebrations I've seen on TV lately are when families reunite with their children who have been abducted or who have been lost for several days. All the people in these situations really know how to celebrate.

People are the most precious thing in life. This was as true in Jesus' day as it is in ours, and so after telling the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus stepped it up a notch and told the parable of the lost son, which you probably know better as the parable of the prodigal son.

We all know how the story goes. A man had two sons, and the younger asked for his inheritance early. He then cashed in his half of the family assets, traveled to a far away country, and wasted his money on wine, women, and gambling. When he hit rock bottom he was hungering for even the slop the pigs were eating. Eventually, the younger son decided to humble himself and go back home. A son who once was lost, returns home and his father prepares a feast for him. That father really new how to celebrate, he put on his son the best robe he had in the house, he restored to his son the family ring, and placed new sandals upon his son's feet. The father even killed the fatted calf and got the place ready for music and dancing.

1 Joyful celebration! That's why Jesus told us the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Jesus was explaining that God knows how to party. God is like the shepherd that seeks the lost sheep. God is like the woman who looked for her lost coin. God is like the father of the prodigal son. Jesus even spelled it out saying twice that, "there will be more joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Paraphrase of Luke 15:7 & 10) God celebrates over those that turn to Him. The hosts of heaven are full of joy when a sinner seeks God's forgiveness. Each and every human being is precious to God, and God wants to throw each of us a party to celebrate our new birth, our entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

2 – Jesus told these three parables not only to tell the people who heaven celebrates, but also to tell the people why God throws parties. You see, Jesus had been partying here on earth with all the "wrong" sorts of people. We see at the beginning of Luke, Chapter 15 that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were angry at Jesus for welcoming and eating with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Being the Party Police, the Pharisees needed to hear an answer from Jesus; why was he celebrating with these lowly people? Jesus answers them with three parables: the parable of the Lost Sheep, the parable of the Lost Coin, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Celebrating after finding a lost sheep the Pharisees could understand. Celebrating after finding a lost coin, also made sense to the Pharisees. But what turned the common sense of the Pharisees upside down was that a father would celebrate the return of a good for nothing son. The father owed nothing more to his prodigal son. The father had raised him well; just look how well his other son had increased his own share. The father had given the prodigal half of his possessions. The son didn't even stay near his father, but left for lands and entertainments afar. He might as well have spit in his father's face for all the thanks he gave him. The prodigal son, wasn't off fighting for freedom, nor did he suffer from a tragic accident or a fight an infection of cancer, and he wasn't abducted nor did he just loose his way. The son asked for his inheritance, liquidated it, and proceeded to waste it in depraved living. The Pharisees could not fathom any reason for the father to accept this prodigal as his son.

The Pharisees needed to accept two keys to unlock the truth of this story. The first key is this: the prodigal son came home humble and ashamed. He returned to his father's house to beg for a job as a hired hand. He confessed that he had sinned and asked for forgiveness. I could go on and on, but the first key is simply that the prodigal son humbled himself and confessed his sinfulness.

Now the second key is this: His father. "while [his son] was still a long way off, saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." Compassion. Compassion is the reason the father accepts his wayward son. Compassion. Compassion is why the host of heaven sing and dance. Compassion is why God loves us.

Everything Jesus did was because he saw what his father was doing first (John 5:19). So why did Jesus celebrate with the lowly and the outcasts of society? Jesus celebrated with them because he had compassion.

Jesus had compassion on the crowds been with him for days and had nothing to eat and fed them. (Mark 8:2 & Matt 15:32)

Jesus had compassion on the crowds – and cured their sick. (Matt 14:14)

Jesus had compassion on the leper – and healed him. (Mark 1:41)

Jesus had compassion on two blind men – and made them able to see. (Matt 20:34)

Jesus had compassion on the boy with a deaf and mute demon – and cast it out. (Mark 9:22)

Jesus had compassion on the widow whose son was dead – and raise her son to life. (Luke 7:13)

Jesus had compassion on Zacchaeus the tax collector - and went to his house to eat. (Luke 19:10)

Jesus had compassion on the crowds who where sheep without a shepherd. He taught them (Mark 6:34) and sent our his disciples to show the same compassion. (Matt 9:36)

3 - Our lives parallel that of the prodigal son, and we need to understand the same two keys of the parables – Confession and Compassion. Each of us has abused the gifts God has given us. We choose to live apart from God. We desire to make our own way in the world. We seek to satisfy our selfish desires. We must confess these short-comings and repent of our evil ways.

All that God asks is that we realize we need God, that we repentant, and that we return to God by trusting in Jesus. For praise be to God, God holds the other key, he is like the prodigal son's father. He is full of

compassion. The prodigal's father had compassion and took him back. The father restored his son and gifted him with tokens of favor and dignity. God showed his compassion for us in that while we were still sinners, He sent his only son, Jesus, to die for our sins, so that we might be restored to God and be given the gifts of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

Conclusion – Like the shepherd who looked for the lost lamb, and like the woman who looked for her lost coin, Jesus came to look for us so that, like the prodigal son we can be restored as God's children. After Jesus went to the homes of sinners and told them about the kingdom of God, the sinners confessed their sinfulness, received God's compassion and the angels in heaven celebrated. The leper he healed proclaimed what had happened. The two blind men who now could see followed Jesus. Those who saw Jesus raise the widow's son proclaimed Jesus a great prophet and praised God. The scriptures tell us that Zacchaeus repented, gave away half of his riches, and entered into salvation that day!

We are an example of to those who would come to believe in Jesus for eternal life. We, the body of Christ, are called into the world to show compassion. We, the church, have been given the mission to preach the kingdom of God and confession of sins so that others may feel the compassion of God. We, the church are, to tell our stories of redemption and celebration. God wants to celebrate over each and every lost sheep – we are to make that happen...