

*“Jesus Welcomed!”*

Mark Trotter reports, “There is a wonderful story about Maya Angelou. She [was] an active member of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco. She wrote that years ago when she first came to San Francisco as a young woman she became sophisticated. She said that was what you were supposed to do when you go to San Francisco, you become sophisticated. And for that reason she said she became agnostic. She thought the two went together. She said that it wasn’t that she stopped believing in God, just that God no longer frequented the neighborhoods that she frequented.

She was taking voice lessons at the time. Her teacher gave her an exercise where she was to read out of some religious pamphlet. The reading ended with these words: ‘God loves me.’ She finished the reading, put the pamphlet down. The teacher said, ‘I want you to read that last sentence again.’ So she picked it up, read it again, this time somewhat sarcastically, then put it down again. The teacher said, ‘Read it again.’ She read it again. Then she described what happened. ‘After about the seventh repetition I began to sense there might be some truth in this statement.’” **“That there was a possibility that God really loves me, Maya Angelou.”** I suddenly began to cry at the grandness of it all. I knew if God loved me, I could do wonderful things. I could do great things. I could learn anything. I could achieve anything. For what could stand against me with God, since one person, any person, with God form a majority now.” (Mark Trotter, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

Our Scripture begins reporting in **verses 1-2**, ***“One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, ‘This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!’”***

Luke presents the situation with Jesus answering the unhappiness of the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law over his welcome of the outcasts. In verses 3-10, Jesus told parables to explain the experience of the lost being found. As Jesus shared three parables, of which two were included in our Scripture Reading, he used a pattern for the lost being found process. Additionally, at the conclusion of each of the parables, Jesus asserted that the same process applied to how God finds lost human beings, so let’s focus on the process.

Jesus taught the first parable in verses 3-6. It was about one lost sheep from the flock of one hundred. What would you, the owner or shepherd, do? **In verse 4 Jesus answered, “You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it.”** He didn’t say you look for a few minutes or hours but “until you find it.” The person, to whom the sheep was lost, does not give up and is determined to do what is necessary to find the lost one. After finding the lost – the lost being changed to the found one shares the good news with everyone and celebrates! For example, you would say in **verse 6, “I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!”** Please note, the owner or shepherd does not demand the formerly lost sheep be punished or that it repent. It is changed because the owner found it – changed its status as an act of grace!

After telling the first parable, Jesus declared how the same process applied to our Divine Parent changing us from lost to found, as he said in **verse 7, “In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.”** Now, the word “repent” or “repents” appears twice in our Pew Bible Translation of that verse, so you might wonder, if I was mistaken in my previous observation of what Jesus described in his parable. I said the owner did not require punishment of or repentance from the former lost sheep. **However, the actual Greek word, which was translated as “repent”, also means “transform” or “change”.** The very fact someone, who is lost needs to be changed to the “found” category is the whole purpose of why God did what our Divine Parent did to find us. So, what did God do to find us? Remember, the owner left the 99 sheep to find the one lost one. **Well, our Creator sent God’s Only Son into this world to inform us of God’s Agape Love for us – God’s Grace – Unmerited Forgiveness and proved the trustworthiness of that Good News by the Only Son, Jesus, dying an undeserved death on the cross!** Sophisticated Maya Angelou was incorrect in thinking God was not in the

neighborhood where she was. She was merely lost and God's Agape Love found her! Unfortunately, many Christians missed that message and heard, instead, the Pharisaic legalistic demands of earning forgiveness by fulfilling the Jewish Law's legal requirements and rituals for sacrifices and offering. Even John the Baptist seems to have been tainted by the legalism of Jewish Society, as exhibited in his fire and brimstone message. I further suspect, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark mistakenly attributed the message of John the Baptist to also be the Gospel or Message of Jesus in the early parts of those books. **However, the Gospel of Luke did not include that attribution to Jesus – Luke did not make Jesus sound like John the Baptist.**

If you look again at the Call To Worship in today's bulletin, then you will see how Jesus demonstrated this way of forgiveness, agape love, and radical and extravagant welcome earlier in chapter 9 of Luke. Jesus brought a child beside him and declared to his disciples in **verses 47-48, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, also welcomes the One Who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the greatest."** This approach of Jesus was in stark contrast to the way the disciples thought of treating children. Remember, they tried to keep the children away from Jesus because they considered them to be unimportant and in the way. The "least" were the outcast and the powerless, including the children.

The second parable Jesus taught to reveal the process of finding the lost was about what a woman would do if she lost one of ten silver coins. **In verse 8a he told them, "She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere until she finds it."** Again, the owner of the lost, in this case – silver coin, takes extraordinary steps to find the lost until it is found. It is not just done briefly but until it is actually found! As in the parable about the Lost Sheep, the finder proclaims the good news of finding the lost and announces to everyone in **verse 9b, "I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!"**

After telling this second parable, Jesus, again, explained how the same process of finding the lost pertained to our Divine Parent. **In verse 10 Jesus declared, "In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents."** God rejoices over one person whose life is changed – whose Relationship with God is transformed because of our Creator's Grace – Unmerited Forgiveness and Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love! The Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law were criticizing Jesus because he associated with the outcasts – sinners, sick people, foreigners, women, children, etc. **He told these parables in today's Scripture Reading to reveal how God is not about inflicting punishment but, instead, seeking the lost through the Son of God – the ultimate expression of God's Grace – Unmerited Forgiveness and Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love!**

If you received this past week in the mail the flier about today or the PDF of that flier in the Friday email, then I hope you noticed the graphic was a depiction which illustrated what Jesus said in the Gospel of John. Our Pew Bible states in **John 6:37-40, "Everyone whom my Father gives me will come to me. I will never turn away anyone who comes to me, because I have come down from heaven to do not my own will but the will of Him Who sent me. And it is the will of Him Who sent me that I should not lose any of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them all to life on the last day. For what my Father wants is that all who see the Son and believe in him should have eternal life. And I will raise them to life on the last day."** Jesus welcomes you, me, and all people because our Divine Parent sent him into the world to be the ultimate expression of God's Agape – Self-giving and Sacrificial Love, Grace – Unmerited Forgiveness, and Radical and Extravagant Hospitality – Welcome! No matter who you are, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and our Divine Parent welcomes you! Instead of following the legalistic ways of the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law – Jesus' adversaries, we are called to follow his way of welcoming everyone – even those, who are consider outcasts by our society. **Let us proclaim, not only with our words but also with our actions, that Jesus Christ welcomes everyone!** Amen.