

November 16, 2003
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

"This Man Welcomes Sinners And Eats With Them."
Luke 15:1-7

15:1 Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law, the religious leaders during the time of Christ, were complaining because Jesus welcomes tax collectors and sinners (the Pharisees linked these two groups together and the more Jesus welcomed them the more the religious leaders complained. The phrase "this man..." was a phrase said with contempt. They probably openly pointed to Jesus and said, "This man makes it a habit to welcome contemptible, despicable, disgraceful people. He has no sense of social superiority for...)

Jesus welcomed the tax collectors:

Tax collectors were considered traitors because they worked for the Roman Government collecting taxes from their own countryman usually collecting more than was necessary and keeping it to increase their own wealth. They were outcasts in the Jewish society. The Jews would have nothing to do with tax collectors and complained that Jesus would have anything to do with them. Some of these tax collectors were coming to hear Jesus teach. We often hear of how Jesus reached out to the poor, but He reached out to the wealthy as well. The people in this group were not outcast because of being poor, or having some disease or handicap, but because they were make money by working for the Roman government. *Jesus welcomes those who are outcasts in the society (rich or poor) if they want to come and hear His teachings.*

The religious leaders also complained because Jesus welcomed other sinners besides the tax collectors.

Jesus welcomed sinners:

By sinners the religious leaders meant those who were not as perfect, flawless and holy as they thought they were. The Pharisees were critical of sinners – but *thank God, Jesus welcomes sinners ... because that means He welcomes me ... and you.* Jesus says in v7: "I tell you that ...there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than

over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” Who *doesn't* need to repent? The Pharisees were not those who did not need to repent, they only thought they did not need to. Sinners were entering the Kingdom of Heaven before the religious leaders because they were coming to hear Jesus, repenting of their sin and believing in Him.

The Presbyterian Church is very democratic. When deciding the direction of the church, each elder has one vote. This includes a teen elder, the most elder elder and the minister. However, many small churches are very much run by the Head Elder. When a decision needs to be made, everyone looks to the Head Elder. When the Head Elder makes a decision, everyone follows the lead.

In a small church on the Oregon Coast, this was very much the case. There was a Head Elder who knew what was right and proper. The church was very proper. The men wore ties to church and all of the women wore hats. Everyone not only knew what was right and proper, their actions were right and proper.

One Sunday morning, the minister had finished his first point and was starting into his second point. A young man walked in. He was wearing a T-shirt. It may have been dirty or it may have been gray from the way it was washed. His jeans were ragged. He had long hair and an earring.

He obviously was uncomfortable. He didn't know what to do. He didn't know what was right and proper. He walked in and looked at each pew. Not sure what to do, he walked past each pew. There were only three rows. This was a small church. When he got to the front, he sat down on the floor in front of the pews.

This wasn't right or proper. Everyone in the church knew it wasn't right or proper, but they didn't know what to do. Slowly, the head Elder came around the pews to the and slowly walked down the center isle. When he got to the front, he bent over. Everyone was sure he was going to set this young man strait. Instead he sat down beside the young man.

With this simple gesture, he showed the young man he was accepted in the church. Accepted with his long hair and all. The people soon forgot the sermon the minister was preaching. But, none of them forgot the sermon by the Head Elder. (Who showed acceptance of someone considered an outcast by his society and a sinner.)

Not only does Jesus welcome sinners He eats with them:

What does it mean to eat with someone. When we ask someone to eat with us we are saying we care about them and want to get to know them better and have them get to know us better. Jesus was welcoming strangers and inviting them to be in His company and have a meal with Him. The religious leaders were implying that Jesus preferred these outcasts to the respectable classes (i.e. the Pharisees and teachers of the law). They were implying that Jesus preferred them because He was like them (and they could not understand how Jesus could care about such shameful people and would want to know them better and wanted them to know Him better). As they had stated before when

referring to Jesus, (Luke 7:34) "Here is a ... friend of tax collectors and "sinners." And they said it with contempt.

But in Biblical times it was important to show hospitality. The Greek form of the word for hospitality literally means the "love or care of strangers." This meaning is probably rooted in the nomadic life. People were conscious of the loneliness of the desert and the provision of food often was a matter of life and death. Even an enemy could not be allowed to die of hunger (Prov 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink).

And when a person came into one's home he was absolutely safe under the protection of the family. When David wrote, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," he was referring to this kind of safety and protection (Ps 23:5). *Jesus is conscious of the loneliness we feel and what He offers sinners is a matter of life and death. Under His protection we are absolutely safe. He prepares a table for us to be in His company and fellowship with Him. He wants us to know Him better. He offers all this invitation: (Rev 3:20) "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

The religious leaders did not get it, so He told them ***the parable:***

"Suppose you had a hundred sheep and lose one of them. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the open country [out in the pasture land] and go after the lost sheep until you found it? Now, maybe some wouldn't. Maybe some would think, "I still have 99 why should I bother with that rebellious, stupid one that keeps roaming away? The Shepherd provides a place for the sheep to eat but some start to roam and eat in areas where the shepherd did not want them to go. And as they continue to roam and eat where they should not be eating suddenly they realize that they are lost. That's what happens to people too. God provides for us within the boundary of His will. But we are tempted to go outside His will. We get a taste of the things of this world that are outside of His will. It leads us on a wrong path and we are lost. But God does care about that one that has roamed away and is lost and He goes after the lost sheep. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. When I was a new Christian my life was so radically different. I was reading my Bible, praying and putting my faith into action. I was telling everyone I encountered about Jesus. I was full of joy and just very excited. I felt great ... but after awhile I didn't feel that high I was on. It wasn't as easy to be a Christian. I was upset and confused as to why I lost that good feeling. I went to speak to an elderly woman in my church. She was a saintly woman; a woman of prayer; a woman of wisdom and of quiet power. I went to her and told her and she said, "Oh, Praise the Lord!" I said this is good? And she said, "Yes!" She explained, "You were lost, Jesus found you and was carrying you on His shoulders. But now He knows that you have matured to the degree that you are ready for Him to put you with the rest of the flock. He knows you can handle it. You should be honored!"

Even after we are Christians there are times when we feel like God is carrying us (like footprints in the sand-during times of difficulty).

Footprints in the Sand

(by: Mary Stevenson)

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,
other times there was one only.
This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life,
when I was suffering from anguish,
sorrow or defeat,
I could see only one set of footprints,
so I said to the Lord,
“You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life
there has only been one set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?”
The Lord replied,
“The years when you have seen only one set of footprints,
my child, is when I carried you.”

I love when God is carrying me.
And when we roam from God He does not forget us – He keeps after us, convicting us
and lovingly drawing us back to Him (although it doesn't always feel like love, it is).
And when we repent and come back to Him He *joyfully* puts us on His shoulders to carry
us back to where we belong. And at first things are great. We feel great, things are going
great, and it seems so easy to be with Jesus... He is carrying us! But soon He takes us off
His shoulders and puts us back with the rest of the flock where there are trials,
temptations and difficulties. Will we stay within the bounds that He has set? It's hard.
We want to roam. I like it better when He is carrying me. It is easy to have faith when
He is carrying me...but I know my faith becomes stronger only when I have
opportunities to exercise it.

*And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his
friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'*
We are all sinners but when we want to come to Jesus He welcomes us. He forgives us
and fills us with His Spirit to nourish the spiritual life He puts in us. And He wants us to
also welcome *anyone* who seeks Him. And to rejoice with all heaven when the sinner
repents and the lost is found.