GOD'S JOY IN RESTORATION
9-14-25

Psalm 14 1 Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. 2 The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. 3 They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one. 4 Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the LORD? 5 There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous. 6 You would confound the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge. 7 O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

1 Timothy 1:12-17 12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the foremost. 16 But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. 8"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

An example of sides (Sunday kick off team favorites). "There is joy in the presence of angels of God over one sinner who repents." I don't know about you, but right now I like to hear about some things that might bring joy in the lives of others, especially those in heaven. The basis of the joy is when someone who was lost is returned to the fellowship of the whole. Now not everyone would be happy, a term I am using loosely, when a murderer is restored to a community in which they have harmed. But it is important for us who are followers of Jesus Christ to consider what it means to be restored.

Jesus tells this parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin to emphasize God's original intent. Sheep were not meant to be separated. Coins that are part of a collection are meant to stay together. Humanity, God's creation was meant to live together, struggle together, and be restored when there has been a change of heart. The grumblings of the Pharisees and scribes at Jesus' apparent acceptance of those who were classified as tax collectors and sinners, bring to light Jesus' attempt to get them to see God's original intent, that we belong together.

The whole is not whole until all parts are reunited. Those in the larger group will be incomplete as well as those who have been isolated and labeled as deviant, sinner or betrayer of the community. The problem with those grumbling is that once "those people" receive a label that is unpopular or undesirable, they are then cast aside, effectively ignoring the image of God in them. This is a catastrophic mistake that continues today in our culture as well as in our United States government. Not only do we cast aside, demonize and attempt to imprison those whom we deem unworthy of our attention, we also cast aside our stewardship of the earth through our collective littering, polluting and poisoning our own environment as if we have another one to live in that is pollution free. This 'casting aside' does almost irreversible damage to others and distorts our own image of ourselves.

Paul's letter to Timothy, and the churches he helped to establish, attempts to restore the vision we are to have within ourselves and at the same time correct the way in which we are to perceive others. He says that, "But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ

might display the utmost patience, making **me** an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life." He received mercy so that, by his example, others would come to believe in Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. Unless I am interpreting this incorrectly, Paul understands he was given mercy in order for that same mercy to be extended to others. He was given patience that he might extend patience. He was made secure in God's love so that others might also be made secure in God's love. And let's not forget, Paul says that he was a sinner, a chief sinner. He pursued, attacked, flogged, arrested followers of Jesus to bring them to trial and often towards death because, he says, of his own ignorance. He was a violent man in his pursuit of preserving his 'tradition' that said who was wrong and who was right. However, once the light and mercy of God came upon him, he changed 180 degrees. God's love changed him. God's persistent grace and mercy remolded him. This is a cause for joy. Paul, or known as Saul at that time, was a lost person, a braggart who went about attempting to "right" these people who chose to follow in the path of the itinerant preacher called Jesus.

God stepped in and brought about a change of heart. Saul, who was lost, was found and changed.

Scott Bader-Saye, associate professor at the University of Scranton, suggest we look even deeper into this for joy. He suggests that the lost and found is related to searching and making oneself findable. He says our text today invites us, as those who are lost, to be attentive and listen for the one who is searching for us, calling us. Generally, as we hear these stories, we quickly assign the part lost to those who are on the margins, the tax collectors and the other sinners. And that is not a bad beginning. We want to offer those who are living on the margins a way in. But what if those who are lost are like Paul. He was an insider, he was the one in power, He was the one who was trying to 'correct' others. Sometimes the ones on the inside are just as 'lost' as those who are on the outside looking in. Those on the inside have often lost their faith, lost their direction, lost their perspective. They often have lost their ability to be compassionate. They have lost their sense of incompleteness. They don't realize that because others are missing from the whole, that they, too, are incomplete. When you have a limited

team, say like a basketball team, where you know and can identify all the members, it is easy to know when someone is missing and get that feeling of incompleteness. But when we look at the whole world, like a football team, and see how numerous it is and how much variety there is, it becomes easy to not notice who is missing in the picture. We don't notice them missing because we are not necessarily close to them. It becomes easy to write certain people off. They are too small, too big, too clumsy or too different from everyone else to be considered valuable. The descriptors to write off people get enlarged when they live on a different side of town, they have an accent, they wear different clothes from us, their skin or hair color or eye color is different from ours, they have a disability. It gets easier and easier not to miss those who are still are precious and necessary to make us all whole. In this scripture text, the Pharisees and scribes have easily forgotten their own sense of incompleteness without the tax collectors and other "sinners". Jesus is there, as the One who is searching, not just for those whom have been labeled as outsiders, but his searching includes

those Pharisees and scribes whose visions don't include their missing parts, those right in front of their faces.

Yes, there is joy in heaven when those who were lost are found and brought back. Heaven rejoices when those who have lost their way are found by God. We acknowledge that God is the One who is actively searching for those who live on the margins. But heaven also rejoices when those on the inside, who have lost their sensitivity and awareness of who is precious and missing, have regained their God good sense and love for their neighbors.

As we consider ourselves today, as disciples of Jesus Christ, do we dare to treat or look at others as less than children of God? It is when we all realize that we need each other, the true restoration can begin. That's because we see, we recognize and we call out our own incompleteness when things are not right. When we are found and when others are found, we can rejoice together as wholeness is being restored. That joy in heaven increases when we see each other as both needed and longed for and indeed we rejoice together.