Luke 15: 1-10

15 All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. 2 The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3 Jesus told them this parable: 4 “Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn’t he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. 6 When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Celebrate with me because I’ve found my lost sheep.’ 7 In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over the one who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives.

8 “Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won’t light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? 9 When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me because I’ve found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God’s angels over one who changes both heart and life.”

Two figures have dominated our news in recent days, Queen Elizabeth, the Second of Great Britain and Vladimir Putin, the first, of Russia

One brought a sense of stability for generations the other profound instability to the world.
One, who led as her nation moved beyond its conflictive, often tragic empirical past,
   The other trying to recreate the past empire by any means necessary.

As we consider what Jesus says today,
   about what God is hoping for in us
   let’s see what he may have to say
   about Elizabeth and Vladimir and us.

Luke begins this passage by telling us that
   the Pharisees, the legal officials of the synagogue,
   are grumbling that Jesus eats with sinners.

Pharisees declared that the reign of God was coming
   and that people were to live as if that were so,
   to live righteously, according to the Torah.

Jesus believed this too,
   but, Pharisees also believed that
   that to stay pure,
   the righteous should distance themselves from the unrighteous.

Indeed, the word *Pharisee* comes from Hebrew word *parush* – meaning *the one who is separated*.

So, they are upset that Jesus mingles with those who aren’t Torah keepers, and so condoning them.

   It is such a strong tendency - to separate ourselves
   From those we think unrighteous....
Anyway, in response to the Pharisees, according to Luke, Jesus tells them stories:

First, don’t you love that instead of getting mad at them he tells stories
   He so wants to bring these brothers into the story that is unfolding in him.

He tells them about a sheep who is lost and a coin which has been lost.

He reframes sin as lostness.
   Not as bad action or even as a bad person
   neither a sheep nor a coin is bad

and that seems so right to me.
   Vladimir Putin, I believe, is lost.
   but it does not make them without value
   Indeed, they are of great value
   not shunned, but sought by God

Who wants their lostness to end
   how does it end:
      Jesus says:
      *I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God’s angels* when the lost one has, and then comes our word metanoeite

*Meta* – which means to change, to shift,
   and *noia* – which means the mind or thinking.
Metanoia - *To shift or change one’s mind or way of thinking or outlook.*
I tell you, says Jesus, joy breaks out in the presence of God’s angels when the lost one changes their way of thinking and living.

And, to me, it seems, Jesus’ story is really about the Pharisees themselves, they are the lost ones who are so sure that God is a punitive rule maker so disappointed in us fallable humans, rather than one who created and delights in us and continuously invites us into a new ways of being for our own and for God’s sake.

But, we got stuck in that moralism ourselves. when those in Rome translated the word “metanoia’ from Greek into Latin translators used the word, paenitentia:
	“to look back with regret and judgment of one’s self.”

You know the word from penitentiary –which we build to separate the righteous from the unrighteous Which sounds a lot more like the Pharisees way of thinking than Jesus’.

and so Metanoia was translated into English as repentance. which has a very different tone from “changing your mind, shifting your understanding.

Throughout the centuries, starting in the second century, theologians have challenged this. in the 1800’s, a Boston scholar wrote to those working on a new English translation, how did such an extraordinary mistranslation
get into our New Testament.

And, he found to his surprise, that everyone agreed with his scholarship, but said that such a modification was impossible since the committee felt that the word repentance had become so much part of our Christian language to that it had to be retained. and it was up to preachers and teacher to explain it.

So, here we are, in 2022, two thousand years after Jesus told this story invited into a metanoia a new way of thinking, like the Pharisees, invited to a change of mind and heart that allows us to to see the fuller reality within us and around us to open our minds to the Kingdom Jesus proclaims not because we are coerced by the fear of a retributive God, but loved into this change by a God who is love itself

John Henry Newman, an English priest in the 1800s He sensed this call to metanoia deeply in the church that the church needed to remain open to the continuing revelation of God He said, growth is the only evidence of life, he said. and to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.
I think this is so helpful—
because the changes that Jesus speaks of
he metanoia he longs for
comes, usually, in small shifts
that over a lifetime,
transform us into new beings.

I have seen this in persons I love
as they age, hold their truths less tightly
more open to the reality unfolding before them.

I believe this happened in Elizabeth Winsor
and I believe that God is working on Vladimir

And God is working on us,
for we are all a little lost,
and God is seeking us all out,
for we are of great value to God.

And God rejoices when we are open
open to the shifts of mind and heart and life
open to the good news of unconditional
love and acceptance
by a God who is love
and who rejoices us in
and all who are willing to fully and freely
live their lives in that truth.

May we so do.
Amen.