

Metanoia: To Be Perfect is to Change Often
September 18, 2022

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
metanoieite

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 metananoia
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 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.*