

## "God's Compassion And Our Mission"

***I'm happy to speak with you, but I had hoped to see you this week!*** We decided on Thursday to wait as long as we could before making the call about our race day picnic since the weather report might change. But we knew that if we had to cancel, we would not be able to pull off in-person worship this weekend, so there would only be the live stream. So, such is life and during this strange season. We talk, consult, pray and make the best decisions we can and accept that we cannot always do what we would have hoped we could.

***I will share the talk I would have given at the picnic about embracing a vision for life and for our shared work together in the church that keeps us on mission for God.*** It might be tempting during a season like this to just hunker down and wait for things to pass, but it is widely recognized that a sense of purpose and mission is important to life. I wanted to return to the passage we looked at last week, **Luke 15**, and share a message about our mission.

***Luke 15 contains a powerful message about Jesus' mission and ours.*** Last week we looked mostly at the compassionate father in the Prodigal Son story, but if you remember, in this one chapter, Jesus tells three stories about lost things: 1.) the lost sheep, 2.) the lost coin, and 3.) the lost son or sons. Do you remember why he told these three stories? **Luke 15** begins in **verses 1-2**, saying: "*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*" This all takes place within what is sometimes called *The Travel Narrative* in Luke because it is a section of stories unique to **Luke** that contain the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. It is also called "*The Gospel for the Outcast*" or "*The Outsider*" because many of the stories have that focus. And that is true here in **Luke 15**. The tax-collectors and sinners were outsiders when it came to the community of strong religious conviction. But it was characteristic of Jesus that they were drawn to him and received by him. Jesus hears the grumbling and uses the occasion to make that point that God is a God of great compassion who wants lost people found. The point that I want to make this morning is that that was Jesus' mission, and he wants us to share that mission with him.

**Illustration:** John Calvin wrote about these parables of the lost sheep, and coin and son in **Luke 15** and said what they teach us is this: "*The*

*whole human race belongs to God, and that therefore we ought to gather those who have gone astray, and that we ought to rejoice when they that are lost return." (Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XVI see Luke 15)*

**Jesus said it was this mission he was on that explained so many of his choices.** In **Luke 5**, Jesus calls tax-collector named Levi to follow him. Levi hosts a dinner and invites his friends. They are a shady crowd, and the religious people grumble. But Jesus basically says, *"Look, this is part of my job description, hanging out with what you call sinners who are far from God; that's why I am here."* Listen to **Luke 5:31 & 32**, *And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. 32 "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* Jesus came for people like you and me who were lost or are lost, and he loves and wants his lost people found. It's the same mission summed up in another story from the same "travel narrative" in Luke. In **Luke 19:10** when Jesus calls Zacchaeus to come down out of the tree and go home with him Jesus says, *"the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* That means not only that he came after you but also that he wants you to seek others with him and for him.

**Later Jesus said his mission has also become our mission.** In **John 20:21**, when Jesus first appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, he said, *"Peace be with you, as the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* So now this is our job description also. There is a place in **2 Corinthians 5:19** where the apostle Paul tells us we are all called to a ministry of reconciliation. He says, *in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Reconciliation is what we see when lost people are found and embraced by grace and God. Listen to **2 Corinthians 5:20-21** *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* If you really look at this passage, and for that matter, the whole Bible, there are only two kinds of people. Which are you? There are some people who have never been reconciled to God. If that is you, then that's the biggest need in your life. If that is not you, if you have been reconciled to God, then that is the greatest gift you could be given. But, with that gift of grace comes a mission of reconciliation. Every child of God is an ambassador of Jesus through whom God makes his appeal to the world. How seriously are we, are you, taking that mission?

***Like the Father who felt compassion, Scripture tells us the thing that compels in our mission is love.*** In **2 Corinthians 5**, Paul talks about what he calls the ministry of reconciliation we've been given by Christ. He begins with these words, **2 Corinthians 5:14**, *The love of Christ controls us. Some version say "compels us". The love of Christ compels us* to live as people on a mission of reconciliation to seek lost people because God wants lost people found.

**Illustration:** I know a man who tells the story of how he gave up on love as a child and then found it again. He said when he was growing up, in his family, there were two emotions, drunk and sleepy Love was not a familiar experience. He didn't really feel a lot of love for anyone. In spite of that, later in his life, he became a true Christian. Not just a churchgoer but someone who knew he needed grace from God and had received grace through faith in Christ. He even eventually got married and had children. Then he said, one day something interesting happened. His daughter got sick. It was ugly sick, throwing up. And that's when he found himself doing something that no argument could persuade him to do, and he was doing it willingly and voluntarily. He was cupping his hands and catching his little girl's vomit so that she wouldn't get it all over herself. He said his natural instinct in situations like that was to get out of the way and keep himself clean. That kind of thing was disgusting and repulsive to him. But here he was doing this gross thing, and at that moment, he said a clear question formed in his head: *Could this be love? Could it be that love was the force, the energy, the compelling drive that urged him to do something he otherwise would never have done?* He said as this awkward scene played out, he had these thoughts: *"So this is love, I am compelled to do this because I love my daughter."* What struck me in his story was that he used the word compelled and used it in a positive way. Love had a compulsive power in his life. And I thought immediately of the words of the apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:14**, *"For Christ's love controls or compels us."* The apostle Paul is talking about love's power to move us to do things we might not otherwise do. He is specifically talking about love's power to move you, if you *are* a Christian, to live purposefully for Christ in this world.

## Conclusion

*How do we respond to this?*

***1st. Prayer. Prayer as a way of keeping your mission spiritually centered and God-dependent.*** I shared a few years ago about a church in which they said the most effective thing they ever did to help reach lost people for Christ was actually the least demanding.

They asked people to just pray. Just identify people in your life: the woman who lives in the grey house, the guy who sits next to you in class. The co-worker who just got married, the old friend from high school... and just start praying for them. They taught them this prayer that they called the 5-second prayer: Here it is: *“Father, please send your Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of these people to draw them to Jesus and make them kingdom laborers.”* It's even better if you can be more personal: *“Father, please send your Holy Spirit to work in Susan's heart to draw her to Jesus and make her a kingdom laborer.”* It is interesting that they felt led to not just pray that the person would be drawn to Jesus but that they would begin to follow him and work to share his love through their own life. *This is something I want to ask you to do.* You don't have to make extra time to do it. You do *in* the life you are living now. Believe in the invisible reality of God's presence and the power of prayer, and pray for the people in your life.

***2nd. The second thing is to invest in people and invite them to Christ and to church.*** As you pray look for ways to build relationships with people - to build trust. Show Christ-like compassion and look for opportunities to share Christ. Believe in the power of a personal invitation. We have seen many people come to Christ over the years after first just taking the step of coming to church, full of uncertainty and all kinds of questions. Sometimes it takes time in a church community where trust is patiently built, and truth is winsomely shared. In the present season, it might be as simple as sharing an invite to watch our live stream during a message series of special interest.

We're going to begin a series like that in March. We are going to take seven weeks, beginning the first weekend in March, to focus on the final days in the earthly life of Jesus. I'm calling it *“The Triumph of Goodness in the Last Days of Jesus.”* We will begin in the Upper Room, go through the cross and the resurrection, and end two weeks after Easter with the ascension. We will put together invitations you can share with others. Pray for the people on your list. Invite them to come or listen in. Trust the Holy Spirit to draw lost people to faith in Jesus.

On **Easter Sunday**, we usually have some of our largest crowds, so this year, to accommodate more people without creating an uncomfortable or crowded situation, we will hold an Easter sunrise service prior to our two regular services. So consider committing to come to the Sunrise service and perhaps bringing a friend or neighbor to join us out back by the pond as we celebrate the ultimate victory of good over evil in the resurrection of Jesus.

**Amen.**