

“Turning Complaints into a Celebration”

Luke 15:1-10, Proper 19-C

September 11, 2016

“Grumble”: It’s an interesting word isn’t it? And here we find it in the second verse of our Gospel lesson today. *“And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying: “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2)!*

Someone once pointed out that if you speak this word 6 or 7 times consecutively that it pretty-well defines itself! So let’s try it: “Grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble, grumble . . .”

Some synonyms for the verb to “grumble” are: “to complain,” “to protest” and “to gripe!” So here are these Pharisees and the scribes, therefore, *grumbling, complaining, protesting, and griping* about the fact that Jesus, in their opinion was keeping some very “shady” company!

BUT PERHAPS WE SHOULD NOT BE TOO QUICK IN OUR JUMPING UP TO PRONOUNCE A WORD OF JUDGMENT UPON THEM!

Why not? Because after all, they were certainly not “bad” people as we sometimes like to identify certain groups of people as being “bad” people. Yes, they were sinners for sure, but not the kind of “sinners” they themselves usually envisioned in their own minds when they were talking about other people.

A. These Pharisees and scribes were to be commended because they were doing their best, they believed, to live in a proper fear of God and in doing their best to love their neighbors; a word which they reserved exclusively to be used only when they were speaking about their fellow Jews.

B. They believed in the LORD God Almighty, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who they also always remembered as: The God of Moses – THE LAWGIVER too!

They thought the best way to hasten the long-awaited advent of their Promised Savior into the world was to be fully dedicated to studying, obeying, interpreting and applying the Law of Moses to their own lives and the lives of other people all around them too!

C. They took to heart those words of that very first Psalm that serves as a powerful introduction to the whole psalter of those 150 found in the Old Testament.

You know the words: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). Yet, in their minds, this is the very thing that they saw Jesus doing!

They failed to see that true righteousness is not simply a matter of one’s own external behavior, but a matter of the heart and of the mind as well. This is something that Jesus explained when he said, *“You have heard that it was said of old: “You shall not murder; and whoever murders his brother will be liable to judgment!” But I say to you that everyone who hates his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22)!*

Therefore, when they saw Jesus hob-knobbing around with people whom they considered to be the scum of the earth: Agents of the IRS and mid-eastern call girls, they were **outraged**. *“The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2)!*

Secondly, we should note—that Jesus does not speak a harsh word of judgment upon them either. What Jesus does is to view this whole situation as an opportunity to turn all these people’s complaints into a time of celebration!

So first Jesus tells them the little parable about the man who had 100 sheep and one of them went astray! What does this man do? Does he simply shrug his shoulders and say to himself: “Oh well, what difference does the loss of just one sheep make? I still have 99 sheep!”

No, he doesn’t say this at all—not if he is a good shepherd. He loves those sheep. He has named those sheep. He doesn’t want to see that runaway sheep meet up with its own demise! So he goes out and searches, not “haphazardly” but very “diligently” Jesus tells us...until he finds it and when he finds it he brings it home, upon his shoulders rejoicing.

Then he throws a party inviting all of his friends to share with him his good news!

You know we might have a hard time relating to a story about shepherds and sheep because they aren’t really part of our lives for most of us here in the USA, at least not in the southeastern United States. But we can all relate can’t we to that dear woman and her lost coin. We all know the panic of losing something very valuable like that! It’s the way a man feels when he reaches for his wallet in his back right pocket and it just isn’t there. Or her emotional state of mind might have been like yours, ladies, when you reach down to pick up your handbag and it’s not there! Boy and girls too know that terrible feeling when there is something extremely valuable and comforting to them, like a favorite stuffed animal, whose presence is nowhere on the horizon!

Therefore Jesus goes on to tell us another story that we can all easily related to—about that woman who had 10 silver coins, but unfortunately loses one! What does she do? Did she say to herself: “So what difference does it make? I still have 9 other coins!”

No she doesn’t say this to herself at all. She lights a lamp, she gets out her broom and sweeps every nook and cranny of her house until she finds that lost coin! Again she is so happy that she also throws a party, inviting her friends over to join with her in her celebration!

When Jesus’ telling of these two stories were concluded—we don’t know if Jesus’ teaching there that day changed the attitudes of those Pharisees and scribes or not!

They were shocking words of Jesus carrying them the most radical idea, when Jesus said: *“There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance!”*

The attitude of many of Jesus religious opponents who thought they knew the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY SO WELL, EVEN THOUGH THEY DIDN’T REALLY KNOW HIM AT ALL WOULD HAVE BEEN VOICED MUCH MORE LIKE THIS: *“There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance!”*

Perhaps a third thing we should notice here is the element of HOPELESSNESS. There is no way that that lost sheep would have ever found its

way back home, or that the lost coin—could have ever found its way back to those other 9 coins—because a coin is an inanimate object!

So also our eternal salvation is ONLY AND ALWAYS a gift to us from BELOVED GOD—and if there was ever anyone in the history of the Church, who had a deep PERSONAL realization of this profound truth, that was certainly the Apostle Paul! That's why he writes these very humbling words that he does to a young pastor named Timothy in our epistle lesson today: *"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance—that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16)!*

*"Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me.
Died that I might never die; Lives that I might live on high!
As the branch is to the vine, I am his and he is mine!*

*Oh, the height of Jesus' love, higher than the heavens above!
Deeper than the depths of sea; lasting through eternity.
Love that found me, wondrous thought! Found me when I sought him not!"*

When we think back to the Old Testament there certainly are a lot of instances pointed out to us there about the children of Israel who seemed to be constantly grumbling against God! My opinion of the Israelites is that they must have been one great GRUMBLING BUNCH OF PEOPLE!

They grumbled about food, about water, so God supplied them with the manna and quail that fell down from the sky, and made it possible for water to flow to them freely out of a rock. They complained about not having a king—like all the other nations around them—but shortly after God gave them kings—they began grumbling against their kings too!

They grumbled to God, against Moses and Aaron. They grumbled together. They grumbled alone while in their tents. They grumbled when things were bad, and grumbled when things were good. They grumbled in Exodus and Deuteronomy. They grumbled in Numbers and in Joshua. They grumbled in Psalms and in Matthew, and certainly here also in Luke's Gospel lesson this morning. But if you read far enough into the New Testament, you will readily discover that many Christians were grumbling too.

We read in Acts 6:1, *"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, A COMPLAINT BY THE HELLENISTS AROSE AGAINST THE JEWS BECAUSE THEIR WIDOWS WERE BEING NEGLECTED IN THE DISTRIBUTION!"*

In I Corinthians 10:10, we read, *"We must not grumble as some of the Israelites had done and were destroyed by the Destroyer!"*

In James 5:9 we read: *"Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged: behold, the Judge is standing at the door!"*

In Jude 1:15, Jude writes about a few members who were: *"Grumblers and faultfinders; that followed their own evil desires. They boasted about themselves and flattered others for their own advantage!"*

Apparently, grumbling is not just an ISRAELITE PROBLEM. IT'S A PEOPLE PROBLEM. IT'S A "ME" PROBLEM. I like to grumble sometimes. I think we all like to grumble sometimes to some

extent, at least, don't we? We like to complain and moan and whine and come up with lots of words that all mean the same thing.

TO SOME EXTENT GRUMBLING CAN BE HARMLESS—MAYBE EVEN SLIGHTLY HELPFUL WHEN WE ARE COMPLAINING TO SOMEONE WHOM WE LOVE WHOM WE KNOW WILL LISTEN AND NOT JUDGE US FOR IT! “VENTING” IS WHAT WE SOMETIMES CALL IT.

BUT SOMETIMES OUR GRUMBLING AND OUR COMPLAINING CAN BE VERY DAMAGING. OUR GRUMBLING ISN'T ALWAYS ABOUT INJUSTICE OR INEQUITIES. SOMETIMES WE GRUMBLE ABOUT EACH OTHER.

In James 5:7-9 the apostle says: *“Be patient then, my brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop; patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”*

How important it is to build one another up instead of grumbling about one another! Not only does our grumbling about one another often take the form of gossip, but it also does not serve to build up the body, but instead tears it down. Again in Ephesians 4:29, Paul writes: *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up accord to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen!”*

We really don't know if the Pharisees and the scribes there that day were effected by Jesus' words here or not? Then Jesus on to tell them the parable of the prodigal son. That parable concludes with the older brother standing outside of his father's house, complaining and grumbling about his young brother—who had come home—which caused the father a great deal of personal elation!

We don't know if he ever went into the father's house and celebrated there or not! On that day the fattened calf was slain and offered up in celebration of the father's redeeming love. Today, we remember how the Lamb of God was slain upon the cross to bring about our eternal salvation. Still today the call of John the Baptist is heard among us: *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29)!*

There is a wonderful Methodist Hymn that the choir has sometimes sung for us here on Good Friday that always touches my heart and mind in a powerful way! I am going to close my message by sharing the words to that hymn together—entitled: “He Never Said a Mumbling Word,” based on Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth!” It goes like this:

They led him to Pilate's bar, not a word, not a word, not a word;

They led him to Pilate's bar, but he never said a mumblin' word; not a word, not a word, not a word!

They all cried “Crucify!” not a word, not a word, not a word;

The all cried “Crucify!” but he never said a mumblin' word, not a word, not a word, not a word!

We nailed him onto a tree, but he never said a word, not a word, not a word!

We nailed him onto a tree, not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word

We nailed him onto a tree but he never said a mumblin' word, not a word, not a word not a word!

Not a word, not a word, not a word; Not a word, not a word; not a word!

Not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word! AMEN