



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

October 2, 2022  
17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Hosea 3:1-5](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 51s

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 2:5-11](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

### **The Believer Grows in Christian Character Which Is It? Muttering or Rejoicing?**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior Jesus.: Amen.

In Christ, our risen and ruling Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

This past week I was visiting one of our members who lives in a facility and had a wonderful visit, but one of the things they were talking about was, "You know? Some of the people in here are always complaining about everything. I want to tell them 'If you're going to be a grumpy Gus all day, no one wants to be around you.'" I told her about a person I used to visit when I was a minister in Minnesota. This person was a grumpy Gus. That's a pretty good description of her. I'd go and visit her and if it was a beautiful, sunny day, it was too bright because the sun hurt her eyes. If it was overcast and gloomy, it was "Why do we have such miserable, gloomy days?" If there was no wind, it was "There's no fresh air in this apartment." If there was a wind, it was "This is too cold." It didn't matter what was going on, the opposite would be better.

Do you know anybody like that? Do you ever find yourself being someone like that?

So one day when she was doing that, she was talking about someone else who was always negative and I said "Man, don't you just feel sorry for people like that? They go through life always complaining about how terrible everything is and they don't see these incredible blessings our God gives to us day after day in His love and His mercy. That would be miserable to go through life without knowing how much God loves us and is pouring His blessings on us, wouldn't it?" I just smiled as I said it all. From then on she wasn't quite as much of a grumpy Gus; maybe a disappointed Lions' fan, but not a grumpy Gus anymore.

But we, who have a sinful nature, we can do this, can't we? We can see things to complain about and get upset about really quickly. Sometimes that just keeps joy from coming into our lives that God really wants us to see. I think that's in essence what was happening in what I read to you from Luke 15 here.

The high religious muckety-mucks of the day, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, were used to people saying "That's how we want our kids to grow up, to be like 'those' people." Then Jesus comes along, who is supposed to be this great teacher, and He's hanging out with tax collectors—people that help their enemies, the Romans; people who, with the power of the Roman army behind them, could steal from the people! These were considered traitors and the worst of the worst. AND, He was hanging out with "sinners"—the people that everyone looked at and said "Those are the terrible people. They've done this, this or this, so those are the people you shouldn't be hanging out with." In fact, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, in their writings, they had taught that there is rejoicing in heaven when one of those "open sinners" suffers, and God delights in that. They had other teachings that said anyone that is near one of these people or hangs out with one of these people is doing what is evil before God. Those were their own manmade laws.

Remember recently we had Paul saying when he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees how, according to the law He was righteous because they had set up their own laws that they thought kept them from sinning against God. In reality, they just ended up getting farther and farther away from God because they were focusing on themselves. They kind of missed what God had Hosea do in our First Lesson. God kind of had Hosea hang out with someone and marry someone that was an "open" prostitute "sinner." It was a picture of how God loves the lost. But when we start thinking we're all of that, we can start muttering about stuff and we miss out on rejoicing.

Our God really said to the Pharisees with the parable He told them, and He says to us today, which is it going to be in your life? Are you going to go through your life muttering about things that God is doing or the people God is doing it for? Or are you going to rejoice that God pours His blessings out on all people? Which are you going to do?

He tells the parable of the Lost Sheep, the parable of the Lost Coin. You've heard those before. They're pretty straightforward. It's a picture of how desperate God is for those who are not connected to Him to be connected to Him. Look at how Jesus tells the parable. He says, ***"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"*** I kind of wonder—I don't know much about 1<sup>st</sup> Century shepherding, I don't know much about 21<sup>st</sup> Century shepherding, but it seems to me that if you are a shepherd, you aren't going to leave the 99 in the open field where the predators can

attack and just to go look for that one. I think you'd probably just say "Well, let's just write it off." The idea that you'd leave them and then you'd go find it and you rejoice when you bring it back and you call everyone together and rejoice with them, isn't that a picture of how desperate God is to have His love known by people? And then when He says, "**...there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents...**"—*(returns; comes back to God and is connected to Jesus' life and death that took away theirs sins)*, the fact that is what causes angels to rejoice as opposed to you, "you Pharisees, you 99 people who think you are righteous when in reality you aren't," that had to be a brisk slap across the face to the Pharisees.

The question I have is—do I not notice that it should be a brisk slap across the face to me at times, or maybe you at times? We would say "We would never mutter about who God is showing mercy and love to. We'd never mutter about more and more people coming to know Jesus and being connected to Jesus." I've seen it happen. You probably have too. Do you recognize when it happens?

I have a relative who, if Jesus returns right this instant, I don't think they are going to be in heaven with me. They've mocked God and told me I believe in an invisible guy in the sky. But when this relative was younger and we were visiting in that area, we went to church together and that relative came when they were younger. That relative kind of made the mistake of, when they stood up in the pew, standing with their foot on the pew. They were dressed in all black and chains and what not. A wonderful little old Christian lady behind us cuffed him on the back of the head and said "That's not how we act in church." I knew what a struggle it was to even get him there that morning. My sinful nature wanted to do some cuffing of its own. I was seething inside. That's not how we act in church.

Sometimes I still see that today. Don't you? Every now and then I'll see kids in the back of church and in front of church and in the middle of church. Kids—they're kids. They act like kids. In fact, even some high school kids act like kids in church, don't they? Do you ever see someone turn around and stare at them? If they had been the watch person on the Titanic, they would have melted the glacier with that look and the Titanic would still be here. I've seen that happen. I've had people say to me "In my day when we had the kids, they didn't misbehave. We did this, this and this and parents should be doing this, this and this." Well, just be happy they are there. Do you really think any of the parents pull up in our parking lot, sit somewhere in the parking lot and say to the kids before they come into church "Okay, now, when the pastor is really boring, here is what I want you to do to act up in church"? No parent wants their kid to do that but they are just happy their kids are there, aren't they? But at times can we find ourselves in our sinful nature muttering and saying "I did better. You should do better"? I think we do that. Isn't that kind of what the Pharisees were doing? Aren't we on a path that says "Why aren't you more like me" instead of "I'm just happy you're connected to Jesus"? We have to be careful of that stuff.

Or, I've seen this happen in my 30-some years in ministry. We say we're all happy when new members come to church and we're happy to have visitors. We're happy to have all that, and we're ecstatic about it as long as they don't sit in our pew. I've seen people stand in the aisle and look at people like, "What are you doing? That's my pew!" It's okay. The Holy Spirit will find you. Sit somewhere else. But we're comfortable in our routine and we do that. I understand the comfort of routine. That's fine. I get that, but sometimes we can make that visitor feel real uncomfortable if all of a sudden they notice someone hovering over their shoulder.

Our goal is always that we want to show love for the lost, like Christ did. That means we want to welcome people. We don't want to put up any barrier that keeps them from getting to know more about Jesus. Because we're sinners, we can't do it. This is who and what we are and this is when we have to remember, if we have failed our God in this area and maybe we have, God has searched and sought us out through Word and Sacrament just as certainly as He did that sheep in the parable. That isn't just for other people. That's for you! That's what your Savior did for you by sending Jesus to come to this earth, to live perfectly, because you can't be perfect. You ain't perfect. You'll never be perfect. And then to die as the punishment we deserve. He poured out the Holy Spirit into your heart so that you know this unfailing love of our God that our Psalm talked about this morning.

You know that He still loves you even though you have failed Him. Then you rejoice because He loves YOU that way. Then you remember that our God seeks the lost and loves the lost today yet, even though His visible presence is gone. He does it today and He does it through us.

How are we going to encourage people and connect with people and help them to see the love that God has for them? That's our calling. In the Bible study we've been doing the last couple weeks, we finished that study today on In Season and Out of Season—how we compare ourselves to share our faith. We don't HAVE to do that to be saved, I get that. God did it all. We don't do anything to save ourselves. But to thank my God who has loved me this way, I want to be more and more like Him, a Christian, a little Christ. I want to be more and more like Him. That means I want to grow in my ability to love everyone, even those that don't look like me or act like me.

How about this one? How about loving people that don't vote like me? I've heard some of our members talk about people that vote differently than they do and if you were someone that voted differently, would you really want to come back and sit next to them in a church after you heard that talk that way?

We're here to love others. We're going to fail at it because we're sinners. But this is our goal—to get better at it. To get better at loving others like Christ loved us; to get better

at being comfortable in sharing Jesus and knowing that we can't convert anyone. That's the Holy Spirit's work, but you and I can speak the message the Holy Spirit works through. You and I can be instruments of God's peace and God's love. That's an incredible gift that God has given us, an incredible privilege He has given us to do.

Then He goes ahead and tells us that all those angels in heaven, they are rejoicing when someone else comes to faith just like they rejoiced when you and I came to faith. Our God loves desperately and He seeks to love others desperately through us. So muttering, rejoicing—some of this is in our control; our response to God's love in Christ. We're still going to mutter at times, but we can get better at rejoicing and we can certainly get better at loving. Because God loved us first, we want to. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7.\)](#) Amen.