



Luke 15.¹⁻⁷

¹Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

³And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. ⁷I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Today's reading has many times left me wondering. Wondering about several things. So, I'll title today's meditation, "Have you ever wondered?"

Have you ever wondered at how often the Gospel's report of sinners coming so openly and confidently to Jesus?

Have you ever wondered what it was about Jesus that permitted them to approach him so trustingly?

Have you ever wondered why so many that think of themselves—likely accurately—as "sinners" avoid Jesus or think that Jesus avoids them?

I can't help but think of Adam and Eve, whom we like to say didn't really even sin but only transgressed—as if the latter is not as bad as the former—far from being drawn to God and confident in His response to their having eaten the forbidden fruit, went into hiding, avoiding Him like the plague. And isn't that what many of us do when we sin and feel guilty? We hide from God, fearful of his... what... sternness, contempt?

So, I wonder, again, what was it about Jesus that drew and comforted the sinner rather than repelling them? What kind of compassion, acceptance, agreeableness, openness, understanding, etc., did he exude that drew rather than repelled the sinner? And, is he still the same today? Based on the admittedly little amount of time that I have spent with him, I have to say, "yes," he is the same today. He is compassionate, accepting, agreeable, open, and understanding of us.

Here's another thing I've wonder about. Maybe you have too. What's up with all the Gospel narratives about dinner parties?

Well, sure, I guess you could conclude that they were simply part of Jesus' history. He had to eat, didn't he. And he, like most people, often ate with others. But I am quite certain the Gospel writers left out many events that were simply part of Jesus' history. So, why do they report so often on Jesus' sitting and eating... with anyone, let alone with sinners?

I guess you've attended dinner parties. Had someone over to your place, maybe. Gone to someone else's home for dinner. Enjoyed a meal with friends at a restaurant. If you think about it, it is pretty intimate. Maybe the only other part of our day-to-day life that is more intimate is sex. I mean there is all that mouth opening and closing. There's that tongue moving about. There's all that crunching and munching—even with the very best of etiquette. There's all that wiping.

Then, too, there are all the little revelations that come with conversation. There's someone else seeing our home, our possessions, our tastes, our habits, our cleanliness and orderliness—or the lack thereof. Yip, there is a great deal of opening up that takes place around a plate of food.

I wonder. Wonder if this is part of the Gospel writers' message. "Open up. Let Jesus draw you in with his attractive personality. Don't worry, you won't be sorry. He won't make you sorry you came. You won't walk away empty. You'll leave filled. Filled with love and hope and gladness. And the feeling will last... and last... and last.

And how about those Pharisees and scribes? I've wondered. Perhaps you have too. I've wondered how anyone could be so confident in their righteousness. It's pure delusion, of course. But they are so sure in their delusion. It seems that they thought of themselves as "just persons, which need no repentance." How could anyone in their right mind think that? It is a wonder.

That's another wonder. How could Jesus speak of "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance"? Such "persons" do not exist! Not only are there not ninety-nine of them, there isn't even one of them. I wonder at Jesus' graciousness in this instance. He was prepared to let it go; to let the scribes and pharisees hang on to their delusions of righteousness although, eventually, he had to come out swinging.¹

Well, I could go on wondering. But we have time for only one more. Have you ever wondered why the shepherd lifted the sheep and "layeth it on his shoulders"? Why did he carry the sheep back to the fold? Why not lead it? I mean, the sheep got itself into its predicament. Shouldn't it show a little personal initiative? Contribute a little something in its return trip home?

It's made me wonder what kind of shape the sheep was in. It's made me wonder about its state of mind. Could it see straight? Could it think straight? Was it even capable of walking? Was it shivering with cold? It makes me wonder, alright. Why do we repenting and repentant sinners so often think so much of ourselves and our pitifully small contribution to our rescue? Why are we so often "proud" of our having the sense to repent? Why do we act as if we were not carried on someone else's shoulders? What makes us think that we are any different than any other sinner?

Well, I am guessing that Lent can be used for wondering. To let the wonder of scripture fill us. Let the wonder of God and His compassion, acceptance, agreeableness, openness, understanding, etc., fill us. Let the wonder of so many's attraction to Jesus' fill us. Let the wonder why anyone in their right mind would turn away from him, not trust him, think that they would go it on their own. Why? Why? Why, I wonder?

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹ See, for example, Mathew 23