

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.⁸ “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:1-10 NRSV

Some years ago in a high school musical I was in the determination for the male lead was how he looked rather than how he could sing. While the visual was great, one needed to cover one's ears as he plan to sing. There is something to be said I guess, for what a visual image tells us about a person. However looks can deceive and sometimes we might miss out because someone comes up to us, or we happen to be nears them, and we don't want to inter act with that person because we make a snap judgment by what we see.

That was the story of the actions of the religious elites in Jesus' day. Religiosity and closeness to God was equated with the “visual” image one saw. If a person didn't measure up to their image, they wrote the person off, and maybe they would judge that person a sinner.

Jesus approached it from a completely different way. It wasn't so much the image he was interested in, but the desire of the individual's heart to know God even if they were from unsavory professions like tax collecting and prostitution. Of Course this infuriated the Religious elites. So Jesus tells two parables which speak of the love and mercy of God to seek those who are lost and go astray. While the “elites” never really understood that message, you can read about many people who did and their lives were transformed in their encounter with Jesus.

In Jesus' day this was really good news to those who wanted to be close to God, but felt shut out. Today it should be good news for us as well. While our situation might not be the same , there are many people who feel for various reasons that they will never be able to draw close to God, or believe that God loves them. In scripture we see God really does go the extra mile to let us know God loves us and we are God's children. The famous scripture, John 3:16, reminds us of God's love in sending Jesus. Jesus himself lets us know when he says in John's gospel “....and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37b).

An old hymn puts it well:
*Softly and Tenderly Jesus is calling;
Calling to you and to me;
See by the portals he's waiting and watching
Watching for you and for me.
Come home, Come home;
Ye who are weary come home.
Earnestly Tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling O Sinner, come home. Will Thompson*

Pr. John Van Haneghan