

***“Celebrate Life”***

**(Luke 15.1-10)**

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***Smile***

One of the great spiritual guides of our time, Buddhist monk Tich Nhat Hanh, offers this prayer for the beginning of each day...

*“Waking up this morning, I smile.*

*Twenty-four brand new hours are before me.*

*I vow to live fully in each moment*

*and to look at all beings*

*with the eyes of compassion.”*

I try to pray this prayer at 6.00am each morning... There are, however, *many* mornings where I have to force myself to smile... through gritted teeth – sore back, cold dark winter mornings, too much work waiting, troublesome parishioners... It’s like cracking ice to get a smile out... but I do it, hoping that even on the worst of mornings I might at least be able to laugh at myself... and notice how easily I slip into a melancholic and anxious disposition... as if I default to some old-life mode during the unconsciousness of sleep.

***Crazy Behaviour*** (Luke 15.1-10)

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells two wild parables...

The stories are essentially the same... The first is of a shepherd who loses one of his flock... so he *leaves* the other 99 defenceless in the wilderness, and goes off to hunt for it. When he finds the lost one, he returns in triumph with it on his shoulders, and calls all his friends and neighbours to a party in celebration! The second story is of a woman who misplaces a coin... a small silver coin of little value. But she won’t rest until she finds it. She turns the whole house upside down... and when successful, she too throws a party, saying to friends and neighbours, *“Rejoice with me, celebrate with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.”*

(9)

Jesus provocatively asks, 'Wouldn't you do the same?' (4,8) And the crowd calls back... 'Of course we wouldn't! That's crazy behaviour! No responsible shepherd would do that – he'd write the loss off... in order to protect the big investment of the 99. His boss would have his guts for garters if he left the main flock unprotected in the wilderness! And let's face it... you're going to lose a sheep or two. Same goes for that crazy woman. We're only talking about a few cents here... and the coin would have turned up eventually. Fancy going to all that trouble, and **then** throwing a party, which would have cost her heaps more than the retrieved coin. Why celebrate that! A big party for a sheep... for a 5 cent piece!! No this is madness. None of us would behave like that.'

'Yes' says Jesus, 'none of **you** would...but God does.' (7, 10) God does! "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." (7)

### **God's Economy**

God is faithful! God never abandons the world regardless of the faithlessness of humanity. God never gives up on a single one of us, regardless of what we do, because each one of us has high value in his eyes. We matter to God and he pursues us with steadfast love. We are never ever written off. And the whole heavenly host celebrates, when even one of us returns home to God.

What wonderful words of comfort these are. How good it is to bask in the warmth of God's love... Oh but hold on... we haven't answered Jesus' question yet. 'Would **we** do the same as the crazy shepherd and the mad woman?'

### **Juxtaposition**

Luke is a clever story-teller... Notice how he bookends this story... the beginning and the end. First he gives us the context... (and I'll swap over to the Eugene Peterson's translation now...) "By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently." But the *proper* religious people aren't happy with this, and they

grumble... *“He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.”* So the story *begins* with grumbling and complaint... But listen to how it ends... *“Count on it— that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”*

Luke sets up a powerful juxtaposition... The proper religious people are mean-spirited... they’re grumbling and complaining. Meanwhile, *up* in heaven the angels are partying... celebrating the smallest turning of grace in the world of humanity.

### **Grumbling**

The complaint of the scribes and Pharisees is quite terrible – they’re angry because Christ Jesus is welcoming the marginalised tarnished ones. How mean that is... and yet *I* too find it so easy to slip into a negative disposition towards life... often without ever noticing it. How easy it is to become jaundiced with life... Disappointment will do it – the simple fact that life hasn’t turned out as we wanted it to. And that terrible sense so many of us have, that *we* haven’t been noticed or valued... that all the attention has gone to others. Sometimes it’s simply getting older that makes us grumpy – too many years of *“suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.”*<sup>1</sup> Me, waking in the morning with gritted teeth, knowing everything’s going to end in disaster today...

But meanwhile, in heaven the angels are celebrating... God’s throwing a party that never ends... and where the very best wine *never* runs out!

### **Celebrating**

There’s a lot to be heard in these twin-parables, but this also... We’re being called out of that old-life temptation to be miserable... into the generous spirit of celebration... into the divine spirit of God that sees life and pronounces it *good*! Paul picks up the cry in his letter to the Thessalonians, saying *‘Rejoice always... be grateful in everything, no matter what. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.’* (1 Thess. 5.16-18)

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Christ calls to us... open up... let go... focus on gift and blessing... celebrate!

Celebrate the chaotic imperfection of it all.

Allow yourself to be a little bit wild and crazy... chase a missing sheep... hunt for a 5 cent coin... throw a party on the slimmest excuse!

Be like the angels in heaven... always ready to have a good time.

Be like God... who looks at us and the whole messy imperfection of creation... and thinks it's absolutely wonderful!

Last week the Holy Scripture called us to *Choose Life!* This week it says... *and while you're at it, Celebrate Life!*

### **Conclusion**

Waking up every morning I smile...

I open my face and my heart to the wonder of it all.

There are twenty-four brand new hours before me. How fabulous!

I vow to live fully in each moment,

indeed... to *celebrate* each and every moment,

and to look at all beings

with eyes of gratitude and compassion.