

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year C September 15, 2013

Theme: Righteous is as Righteous does

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Do you suppose the bishop would start getting letters is I missed a few morning masses because I was hanging out late nights at the **Hurricane Club and the Mousetrap?**

And when I wrote the Bishop a letter of explanation, do you think he would be satisfied if I suggested he read Luke's Gospel Chapter 15, today's Gospel text?

“The scribes and the Pharisees began to complain, saying: ‘This man [Jesus] welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

Somehow the scribes an the Pharisees, the good and holy people of Judaism, the ones who were honestly trying to follow the ways of the Lord, could not find it in themselves to welcome back **those who had strayed, who had been lost.**

They could not appreciate the importance of **Jesus' ministry to the lost ones.**

Like the elder son of the third parable they were so **wrapped up in their own righteousness**, their own sense of their own worthiness, they could not rejoice in the return of those who had, for whatever reason, been away from the Lord.

Jesus chose to focus his attention not on ministry to the saved, the righteous, but to the lost: the sinners, the tax collectors, those who had run away, perhaps out of their own stupidity or narrow-mindedness or whatever.

- he ate with them.
- he spent time with them.
- he gained their confidence and friendship.
- he listened to their stories.

---he didn't judge them for they were their own judge and jury.
---he told them of a God who loved them and always forgave them.
---he invited them to come home.

There are two directions this Gospel might take us today.

First, of course is that **example of Jesus**: we do not have to go to the Hurricane Club or the Mousetrap to find lost and estranged souls.

Often they are **in our own families, our workplaces, our neighborhoods.**

They are folks who made **bad decisions** years ago; those who were hurt by others, by institutional rules or leaders, by misunderstandings.

They are people who **don't even remember** what went wrong for them or when; people who got mixed up in **terrible relationships.**

The trick is learning how to **listen without preaching**, knowing how and when to open a conversation on the subject, **hearing without judgment** nor condoning, prompting without leading.

Sometimes these sisters and brothers have to find the inner strength and the outer support to **move away from booze or drugs or other destructive behaviors** before they will ever come home but we were there to invite them just as Jesus had been.

A second path suggested by today's Gospel is to **examine ourselves** for signs of the righteousness that plagued the scribes and the Pharisees, that characterized the elder brother of Jesus' parable.

We who take faith seriously, who rejoice in our relationship with the Lord, can -- like these characters of the Gospel -- **develop an attitude, an edge** toward those who have not been faithful, who haven't walked the straight and narrow.

We've gone to church; we've kept the commandments; we've done what we should.

We're the good little girls and boys: so why should we go out of our way for those who went off to have a wild old time while we've been back here slaving away?

The point, however, is not our small-mindedness but God's abundant, overwhelming, always forgiving love.

Our attitude should not be one of self-righteousness – like that of the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospel, but one of welcome and invitation.

Not: "We're here at church on Sunday morning where they should be instead of at home in bed or out on the golf course."

But: "I wonder what we could do to entice them to come to mass after golf or later in the day?"

Jesus' attitude was to seek out the lost, find the sinner and offer them God's forgiveness, chase down the runaway and show him or her the way home.

When we ourselves have been the one lost, the sinner, the runaway we know how amazingly wonderful his attitude is.

What a shame ever to deny it to one another.