

## Trinity 13

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever felt lost? Maybe at the point of a major life change, like retirement, after a move, after a significant loss or maybe as you became a parent? Or in a more literal sense, as you were walking, driving or travelling and suddenly realised you had no idea where you were and no idea how to get to your actual destination.

Being lost is an uncomfortable feeling. It can make us panic. Where am I? How am I supposed to handle this? Who am I in the face of this massive change? How do I go on now? Questions like these might go through our minds. Feeling lost we likely also feel alone and isolated. Does anyone understand what I am going through? Does anyone still care?

Being lost we long to be found. For someone to see us, understand us and to walk with us or lead us back to a place of safety, a place we know and where we are known. When you have felt lost, what or who helped you to find your way back to a place of safety, a place where you were known?

Jesus has a particular love and care for any and all who feel lost in any way. Anyone who feels isolated, anyone who is unwanted, doesn't quite fit in, isn't quite the right sort. Anyone confused and disoriented, lost and afraid in any way. And because people who in one way or another are feeling a bit lost are not always at their best and most presentable, it

means that the people Jesus particularly reaches out to, are not necessarily the people one would gather at a respectably impressive dinner table. Certainly, the pharisees in our gospel reading today were anything but impressed by the kind of people Jesus chose to share a table with:

**And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’**

Jesus doesn't care about what is proper and nice. Jesus sees into our hearts, sees our longings, our fears, our need to be wanted and loved. And Jesus consistently reaches out and loves us, lets us know that no matter what, we are wanted and precious in the eyes of God. And Jesus doesn't care if others disapprove of all the messy people he welcomes and shares a table with. All are precious and beloved in the eyes of God and all are welcome at God's table. That includes you. And it includes that person that gets on your nerves and the one you disapprove of and also the one you feel doesn't deserve it.

**And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’**

Sometimes, we might be a little like the pharisees, grumbling and doubtful that **this** particular person is really worthy of Jesus time, of God's love and care. And sometimes we might feel exactly like the people these pharisees grumbled about. Like God could not possibly want and love us or if God wants us and loves us, then at least God's people, the nice and proper people in the church might not like Jesus welcoming us to God's table as well.

Yet Jesus makes it abundantly clear: We are all God's sheep, we are all precious to God, who has wanted us and loved us long before any of us ever took a single breath. And because each human being is so utterly beloved and wanted by God, God will do exactly as the shepherd or the woman in Jesus' parable: Doing everything within their power to find and bring home safely, and with celebration, what has somehow ended up lost.

When we feel lost, we often also feel less worthy and when we see someone lost, there is often a temptation to see them as less worthy. Just think of our reaction as a country over the last few weeks to people, who have lost their homes and much else, who come to this country in the hope they might be able to rebuild their lives in a safe place. If Jesus walked our streets and decided to share a meal with people in a migrant hotel rather than at a lovely bring and share in a church, how would we react?

All are beloved and cherished in the eyes of God, but God has a particular care for all who feel in anyway lost at times. This is a comfort and reassurance to us whenever we experience being lost. And it is a challenge to us as we follow Christ. A challenge to remember God's particular care for all who might feel a little lost, alone and vulnerable. A challenge to be on the look out for them and reach out with care, just as Christ reaches out to us. As we gather for teas and coffees after services, as we encounter strangers in church and in our neighbourhoods, are we willing to be on the lookout for strangers, for the lonely and the lost and reach out to them with a welcoming smile and a friendly chat, leaving to the side for a moment our well-known friends and neighbours?

Amen.