

# Speaking to the Assembled Crowd

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 09-15-19

At Crossroads United Methodist Church

Waunakee, WI

Today, Jesus offers us 2 parables that tell us about God & especially about God's nature to forgive & restore God's people.

Jesus today wants us to consider what it means to be 'His People,' and what boundaries we have.

In asking this, Jesus invites us to consider what God is like by reflecting on our own experience.

Crowds are pressing in around Jesus to hear his teaching.

They gather with mixed motivations:

Rel. Leaders: to keep tabs on what Jesus says – possibly to be used later – like the files collected by J. Edgar Hoover;

Disciples: to receive instruction;

The People: They came because this preacher sounded different & all too many have found themselves on the fringes.

They are described as “tax collectors and sinners” – people with such bad reputations that they find themselves *by themselves*.

And these accusations had their effect; no one wanted to meet or be associated with “tax collectors and sinners” Lest they be implicated too.

Today's gathering around Jesus was a strange assembly of saints and – hardly the kind of guest list that most would put together.

If “you are known by the company you keep,” you can see why the religious leaders have been thrown into disarray.

Murmurings and side conversations arose in the crowd and this motley crew that Jesus brought together by his teaching that day, began to splinter.

- Who invited *them*?
- Why would Jesus care about *this* woman, *that* man?
- Does Jesus not know who they are?
- Doesn't he know what they do for a living?
- Who is this Jesus, anyway?

“He speaks with such authority about God and yet look at his checkered flock!”

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Jesus sensed the growing division of the crowd and spoke to them in terms they could understand.

He talked about things they valued. Jesus wants them to think about what is most important to them.

For example, the shepherd values the health and safety of his flock – his source of income.; the woman values to hard-earned money she has scraped and saved in order to care for her family; the parent values the well-being of his or her children.

Think about that thing that is most precious in your life – something on which you place the utmost value goes missing. The devastation! And although people do adapt, life is forever altered. Part of the whole is missing.

God is like the shepherd who values each sheep in the flock, or like the woman who accounts for every coin in her purse.

In 1961 the Michael Rockefeller, the son of Gov. Nelson Rockefeller – went missing on an anthropological trip to New Guinea. Nelson Rockefeller made the 10,000 mile trip. He personally combed the beaches; he trekked the jungle and scoured the swamps – not his handlers or his aides.

He said, “I want to be out there if they do find him.” As the days wore on and the search wound down, he said, “So long as there is a real hope of finding him, I will stay.”

That perseverance, that single-minded pursuit of the lost is at the heart of the Gospel.

God treasures every child of the family. When one goes missing, God goes into “Search Mode.” God’s nature is love and love looks like one who goes out tirelessly searching.

Singer/Song writer Joan Osbourne put it this way in her song, *One of Us*: “What if God was one of us . . . trying to make his way home.”

The murmurings of the Pharisees and scribes would judge Jesus by the company he kept, implying that the one who shows hospitality to the sinner is himself a sinner.

But the sinner – the one of the outs – sees things differently.

Jesus understands the struggle with being separated from others, and the struggle to return. Jesus doesn’t turn away from those who

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are lost. He goes toward them, to make a place for them; to welcome them home.

Jesus understands that those on the outside looking in are supposed to be part of the community. Today's parables are about a hospitality that seeks to forgive and restore.

Friends, a seeking God means a seeking disciple, and a seeking church. The ministry of Crossroads Church to our community can be no less.

It is my hope that Crossroads can take these parables of Jesus with hope. I hope that we can make room for those who are lost and those not good enough for others. I hope that we can never place a border or a boundaries on

Today's parables of Jesus are a call to Crossroads to open its doors and rejoice.

The sheep who wandered off from the rest of the flock, lost in the thicket, is now safe and sound! The coin that fell through the cracks was easily forgotten but is blessedly found.

When someone in our neighborhood – someone in our community – has been placed on the fringes of society, we are all affected.

When someone is restored, we are all better off for it.

This is a hard thing! While there are always going to be churches that can draw the line, it is my hope that Crossroads may be the

place where a way is found to include those who aren't good enough – because *they are good enough* – for God!