

As Christians we like to say that we have Good News. Well, today we're going to hear what I think is probably the BEST news that could ever be heard from anywhere! OK? But first, we need to squirm a tiny bit. As Americans in particular it is said that 80% of us "believe in the Bible," whatever that might mean. Less than 20% of people actually go to church, so counting for the other 60% of Bible believers might be tough. But let's just stick to the 20% who actually are involved in churches. Of that group of people, what percentage are engaged in not just reading but actually studying and learning from this book that almost everyone supposedly believes in? Not many churches have Bible study. Most pastors don't have extensive training in the Bible. When I went to seminary long ago, to graduate we had to have 5 total classes on the Bible, with 3 being NT and 2 being HB. Well, you don't cover 66 books in a Protestant Bible with 5 classes.

If we can read, and we have some time, there is no good reason why American Christians cannot make the investment into opening up this book that supposedly most people already believe in. But why should we do this? Well, so that we could eventually work our way through things like Luke 15, which I hold as one of the most special chapters in all of the Bible. There are other great chapters. But Luke 15 is top shelf! In fact it is so top shelf that I wanted us to go through it this morning. Both of our Bible study groups recently went through Luke 15, and it was an enriching and nourishing experience both times. So, this morning, we are all going to do a little Bible study. I hope that you are able to share and look off from each other. And let's remember that I am calling this message "The Reckless Love of God."

(let's work the 15th chapter !)

Let me mention that the Bible is a big library, it is not one book, and it never has been. It has incredible variety. There are other places that will operate like this. But, there are so many others that do not. But if God can speak to us this particular morning about this chapter, I hope we come away with the following thoughts:

1) This whole thing is set up on the concept of “what do we do with Bad People?” What will God do with Bad People, and what should we do with Bad People?

2) I believe that we have a moment of truth here regarding what we actually believe about God. It is easy for us to believe that God behaves much like we do. That would be normal. I think that Jesus with some help from the Gospel writer we call Luke has shown us that God is not just like us. God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

3) According to Jesus, we should understand that he wants us to know that God is actually a reckless lover of us all. God is like the shepherd who would let his 99 sheep run away in order to go after the 1 who is headed for the cliff. God is the one who provides the effort, like the woman who tears her home apart for the sake of one lost coin. We are told regarding one lost lamb and one lost coin that God and the angels of Heaven rejoice over one sinner, one bad person, who gets turned around and walks away from self destruction.

4) Regarding the Prodigal Son, we tend to give this boy too much credit. He makes a business decision. He can get a better job

if he goes home. He knows that his Dad will be kind. But he is not penitent! The story is about the Father who waits every day, who keeps looking down the road in case his crazy son decides to come home. He finally sees him and runs to him, rather than make him beg and apologize. The Father doesn't want an apology. He just wants this bad son. In fact he always wants the bad son and the bad daughter. Jesus wants us to know that. Because God loves them all.

5) And to the people who were fortunate, who were raised well, who are seen as the good people, God says "You are always with me. But you need to rejoice when the troubled ones can be redeemed. The angels are dancing. Why aren't you?"

The Bible is big, and deep, and wide. And it has much to say, and much in us to shape. But it won't happen if we let it stay sealed up on a table somewhere. What is the Good News for this day? God loves all of the people whom we might designate as "bad people." And God will never stop tearing the place apart and searching for those who have lost their way. And we should not stop either.

If God loves the sinners so much, then God must love us too. But then we need to remember: when we want to just write people off, throw them away, cast them into darkness because we cannot be bothered, when we want to judge and condemn, we need to remember that this is not the way of the God of Life which we learn about from Jesus who came to tell us. Thank God for such great love. May we live accordingly and take the next steps that are needed. AMEN.