

As a young child, my mother's brother caught a severe cold that turned into pneumonia. He lost his hearing as a result. My grandfather was devastated. He walked the streets crying over the resulting deafness. Today, something might be possible to restore his hearing. But in the 1920's there was nothing that could be done except for sending the young boy away to a special school for the deaf. My grandfather would have done anything to help restore his son's hearing.

Today's Gospel from Luke begins with two short stories that have a very happy ending. The Shepherd who has lost one sheep leaves the 99 in search of the one. He finds it and is filled with joy. Likewise, a woman with 10 coins is distraught when she loses one. She is filled with joy once she finds it and throws a party that may very well cost more than the coin she has found. God's love for us is so deep and he is filled with so much joy when what is lost is found.

God's love is like that of my grandfather. When we turn a deaf ear to the Lord, he cries and mourns the loss. He would do anything to help restore a deaf person's hearing. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16).

I had another uncle who was a poor student. When he brought his report card home, he knew his father would be disappointed. The discipline he received was meant to encourage him to try harder and to do better. My uncle had the ability to accomplish great things but somehow, he never quite applied himself to do well in school.

We might liken the Pharisees and scribes to my uncle. They looked down upon Jesus for being in the company of sinners and tax collectors and were always at odds with Jesus. Jesus tried to help them and motivate them and encourage them to do better by telling parables to help them see from a broader perspective. Jesus wanted them to see as God sees.

We live in a divided nation and to associate with individuals who view the world differently is often akin to being in the company of tax collectors and sinners. One might argue that America is more divided now than it was during the civil war. One commentator explains:

We are ... divided not only by ideology and policy preferences (that's normal; it's what elections are supposed to decide) but also by the way we see the world. The two sides seem to occupy different universes. One universe observes facts, respects science, and values at least the goals of democracy and civility; the other universe does not. And the two view each other with seething contempt.¹

Despite the outcome of the election, the clash of world views will continue. Although a candidate may be defeated, the ideas and disappointment of his followers will endure.

We have turned a deaf ear to each other, and God mourns the loss. As a nation, we are better than the divisiveness that has taken center stage. Rather than comparing one another to sinners and tax collectors, might we start by listening to one another and respecting the other person even if we disagree with their viewpoint. The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. As individuals let us take that first step to civility. Let us replace hostility with hospitality. Each of us has the ability to accomplish greater things by seeing from a broader perspective. We are capable of loving our neighbor, of finding the lost coin of democracy and in coming together to celebrate with joy.

¹ Kaplan, Fred. Slate.com, Maybe This Is Who We Are.