Text: Luke 15:1-10

**Introduction**

How wide is the gap? How wide is the gap between us?

That’s something that we always seem to be measuring. Whether it is the distance between the young and the old. Which is often these days measured in housing values. Or the distance between men and women, which is measured in divorces and loneliness. Or the distance between left and right which might be measured in firings and dead bodies. We are always measuring the gap between us. And when you are measuring something, it never seems to close.

But for all of those things that we seem obsessed with measuring, we never seem to measure any more the gap between the holy and the profane. As I was contemplating what I would attempt to say today it struck me that this week actually began with the Roman church declaring two “new” saints. Now I don’t really want to get into the doctrinal weeds about what Rome thinks it is doing there. If you want to talk a bit about that we can carve out some time in bible study. But declaring saints is something very different than trying to measure the gap between the holy and the profane.

In fact the one declared, the millennial saint – Carlo Acutis – was fascinated by the gap between the holy and the profane. And what particularly fascinated him was one very Roman way that God attempted to close that gap. Acutis was fascinated by what Rome calls eucharistic miracles. Times and places where the elements of communion – the bread and wine – showed physical signs of being the body and blood. Now we Lutherans wouldn’t go looking for such miracles because while we share the teaching that the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the sacrament, we teach the sacramental union. The body and blood are in, with and under the bread and wine. But for both Roman and Lutheran, this table is a place where the holy and the profane meet. Acutis was fascinated with cataloguing the temporary places the gap was crossed. We Lutherans do that too, we record who came to communion. Because this is a place where the profane and the holy meet. Around this table.

And before I make the turn to our lesson for the day I want to share a quote, to let it percolate in your heads, until we return to it later.

“[W]hen people stop talking, really bad stuff starts. When marriages stop talking, divorce happens. When civilizations stop talking, civil war ensues. When you stop having a human connection with someone you disagree with, it becomes a lot easier to want to commit violence against that group. … What we as a culture have to get back to is being able to have a reasonable disagreement where violence is not an option.”

**Text**

Now it was always Jesus’ work to bring the holy and the profane together around a table. “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘this man receives sinners and eats with them.’”

Those scribes and pharisees were in the business of measuring the gaps. In particular they cared about the gap between the righteous and the unrighteous. Which might or might not be the same thing as the holy and the profane. But in either case they placed themselves as the righteous. Kinda like anyone who spends time measuring gaps, they all eventually end up with the person or group doing the measuring as the center or base of measurement. And there were people you could eat with and remain righteous even if they didn’t quite measure up. And then there were those beyond the pale. You couldn’t eat with them. Maybe even to talk with them risked your status as righteous. The tax collectors and sinners.

Yet it was to these vary groups that Jesus came. And he talked. And he ate with them. And the Pharisees were often confounded. Because they could see the Jesus was a personally righteous man, but he cared not a bit about maintaining the gaps.

Now I can’t imagine for those tax collectors and sinners that having Jesus at table was always comfortable. Because Jesus didn’t just ignore what they did. His proclamation from the start was “repent, for the Kingdom is near.” And when the tax collector Zacchaeus has Jesus to dinner he literally does that. “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. (Lk. 19:8 ESV)” Since Zack was a chief tax collector, and since the Pharisees and probably most of the other Jews wouldn’t have come over, I imagine Zack’s table was a bunch of his tax collector reports. And Jesus. And I can imagine just how well Zack’s repentance went over. Zack isn’t getting that four-fold out of me. But Jesus responds, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Lk. 19:9 ESV)” And there are plenty of other occasions. You will never find one where Jesus just accepts a sinner as they are. He doesn’t tell Zack to sit down he is just fine. He tells him “today salvation has come.”

**Christology**

Jesus doesn’t accept sin, he absolves it. Jesus himself bridges the gap of the holy and the profane.

That gap is the biggest gap there is. So big we can’t measure it. So big, we give up trying. We create new measurements – like the Pharisees – that we can, that give us a chance on our own terms. Or maybe we end up just saying ignore that gaping chasm that eats everything. But Jesus – the Holy One – came to us profane. Jesus, the son of God, became the Son of Man. And he came to seek and save the lost. He came to bridge the gap.

And this is the core point of the parable’s Jesus tells here. He tells three in a row. We only have two today, because the final one is next week. But they are parables about the chasm between the holy and the profane, between God and sinners. Now if we had 100 sheep and lost one, we might spend a little time looking, but we surely wouldn’t leave the 99 in the open country. But this is the way it is with God and the Kingdom. God wants to find the 1. And unlike with us, if we leave the 99 they might now be open to wolf attack, those 99 are still under God’s providence. But finding the one and bringing it back. Calling the one sinner to repentance is what God does. It is who he is.

Likewise the second one with 10 silver coins. Now we’d probably spend a bit more time over the one coin, call it $300 dollars. We’d check all our pockets. We’d retrace steps. We’d grill the kids. “Did you take $300 out of my wallet?” But if it didn’t turn up we’d eventually say, “It will turn up.” And go back to watching football. But that is not what God does.

The last one – next week’s lesson – is the prodigal son. 100 sheep, 10 coins, 2 brothers. If God won’t just let 1 sheep go, or 1 coin, is he going to let humanity go – however you want to talk about the gap? Older and younger, Jew and Gentile, Righteous and prodigal?

Jesus came to close the gaps.

**Moral**

Of course when someone like that shows up. What do we do with him? We typically kill them. Most of the named saints – who are smaller ways of bridging the gap – are also martyrs. Bridging the gaps destroys the power and sense of a superior self of the Pharisee and scribe. As Caiaphas would say, “it’s better for one man to die than for us to lose our place.” And most sinners, if not happy, are not really ready to repent. They’d rather not be reminded of the growing chasm in their own soul that separates them from God. Giving up our personal sin is often like giving up ourselves.

But God does not stop talking.

It was Charlie Kirk who said that quote I recited earlier. It’s quite wise. When people stop talking, really bad stuff starts. That’s when we start killing. To Charlie’s credit, he never stopped talking.

**Eschatological**

Charlie maybe was a bit more optimistic than I could ever be. He seemed to really think by his own person showing up again and again he could bridge the gaps. He could build those human connections. I probably would have said some snarky combination of “Who do you think you are, Jesus.” and “you know that ends in murder, right?”

But maybe he was just more hopeful. Because God does not stop talking. He’s come to save the lost. And he does that through the foolishness of preaching. He does that through a church that is the greatest collection of jackwagon sinners ever assembled. And the old joke is certainly true. The greatest proof the church is a work of God is look at her leadership. Any merely human organization run by the collection of craven cowards and venal sinners would have collapsed long ago. If your righteousness doesn’t match that of the Pharisees Jesus once said.

But Jesus continues to show up. Wherever two or three are gathered. He continues to bless this table of sinners with his presence. He continues to bridge the holy and the profane, in himself. And he absolves our sin and makes us part of his own body.

And Christ shall have the last word. When we are all called from our tombs in the resurrection. And He declares his endless peace. Amen.