

# “EVERYONE MATTERS”

**READING:**      ***Luke chapters 14 verses 15 – 24 and 15 verses 1 - 32***

As if this year has not been bad enough thus far. We had floods at the beginning of the year – and communities pulled together to help each other out. Then the virus struck – and communities once again pulled together to support one another. Now all this community building is being attacked by angry voices, violence and rioting. Please do not get me wrong. I am, and always will be against injustice. I am against racism. As an Irishman in Wales, I have had to put up with the jokes and snide comments - even in the very place which claimed to promote equality in the workplace. I have endured, like many others, the snide comments and abuse thrown against my Christian beliefs. Each one of us, I am certain, has endured something where others have tried to bring us down. What has happened to all that community spirit which has been created when troubles hit us? People have a right to speak out about injustice in our world, but I am saddened by the fact that what happened to George Floyd in America, and not just to him but to many other people, has been hijacked by those who see it as an excuse to vent their fury and cause violence and take the lives of those going about their daily business and properly doing their job. To be totally honest, I am more than saddened, I am angry. None of what is happening will bring George Floyd back to his family. But I do hope that his family will receive justice for what has happened. Even they speak out about what is happening, supposedly in his name. I agree with the slogan “Black Lives Matter”, but so do all lives of all peoples on this earth and until we accept that all lives matter to God – **ALL LIVES** – then this current trouble is going to rip humanity apart. In ***Luke chapters 14 and 15***, Jesus teaches 3 parables highlighting that all people matter to God.

In ***Luke 14 verses 15-24*** Jesus told the story of the “Great Feast.” A man planned a great party and sent out messengers with personal invitations for his friends to come to the party. Sadly, the servants returned with excuses and refusals from those invited. Undaunted, and somewhat miffed, the master sent his servants out into the streets and alleyways with instructions to invite the undesirables, the unfortunates of society and tell them to come. With still more space available, the servants were sent further afield and bring back anyone they could find to fill his banqueting hall. Jesus’s purpose in this story, this parable, was that all people matter to God, that the Kingdom of God was for all who would accept His invitation to His table of love and grace.

In ***Luke chapter 15***, we find the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. He tells of a Shepherd counting his 100 sheep and if one is found to be missing will go out and search until he finds the lost sheep. Jesus’s purpose here is to illustrate the joy experienced in Heaven over one wandering sinner who repents and returns to the fold.

He then goes on to tell another parable of a woman who had ten silver coins, representing her fidelity in her marriage. One coin was missing and she was desperate to find it and continue to receive honour from her husband. In desperation she searched until she found the one lost coin. When she finds it, she throws a party for all her friends and neighbours to celebrate the fact that she found the coin and proved her integrity in marriage. Jesus said, “In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

The final parable of the lost son, or the prodigal son, shows us how God never gives up on anyone, even if they chose to go their own way in life. As long as a person has breath God waits patiently for the person to turn around and come back home. These parables teach us, as does a proper reading of the Bible, that all lives matter to God – that He does not give up on anyone. Then again we also read that:

## **I. God has no favourites**

All people matter to God. God does not limit His love to those who He thinks are worthy of His love. In ***John 3 verse 16*** we read that ***“God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall have everlasting life.”*** When Jesus died on the cross,

His outstretched arms embraced the whole world. His work of salvation was not just for the select few, but for all people everywhere. God's grace was poured out for all peoples, of all races, because all people matter to God. The Apostle Peter wrote ***"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*** (2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9). If God does not show favouritism, then neither should those who have received that love for themselves. All have the privilege of coming to Jesus. As Jesus taught that God does not show favouritism, we learn that He also taught that:

## **2. God's Grace is not Limited.**

The Jewish religious leaders taught, and firmly believed that only Jews could experience the Love of God. Only Jews could have the assurance of God's forgiveness and salvation. The Bible teaches that God's law reveals our sin and reminds us of the penalty for sin. The law cannot save. Only God's grace through Jesus provides salvation from sin. The Bible doesn't teach that only Jews, or only Baptists, or Anglicans or Methodists who call on the Name of the Lord will be saved. Rather we are reminded that "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Nowhere does the Bible teach us that God has chosen a select group to be saved, receive His gift of salvation and that everyone else will be lost. God has created each of us with "free will", giving us each the opportunity of choosing his/her own destiny. You are free to choose your Master. God's grace is not limited. We can choose to accept or reject His grace. WE can be like the thief on the cross alongside Jesus and accept His promise of salvation, or we can turn away from Him and face an eternity without Him. The Bible teaches that God does not show favouritism, and God's grace is not limited and finally:

## **3. God's Grace sets us free**

In ***John chapter 8: verse 1, Jesus said: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free"*** and in ***Galatians chapter 5 verse 1, the Apostle Paul taught: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."*** When we choose to follow Christ we are set free to become the person God has created us to be. In ***Romans chapter 12 verse 2*** we read ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."*** God's grace sets us free to be ourselves and not just to please people. God's grace also sets you free from legalism – from all the rules and regulations which well intentioned Christians will put in place, very often to "help us" to conform to all that they believe, but are not strictly biblical. This Christian legalism causes harm to the cause of Christ's work around the world. ***1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 7*** - gives this truth: ***"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, or love and a sound mind."*** Don't throw out common sense as a follower of Jesus. We all need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and common sense. God's grace sets us free so we should not abuse that freedom. There is something wrong with the person who says he accepted Jesus and then declare: "Now that I'm saved I can do anything I want. I can lie, cheat, and steal and still know that I am eternally saved." God's grace does not mean we are free to live anyway we wish, whatever the consequences. God's grace sets us free to choose right over wrong.

All people matter to God – God does not show favouritism, God's grace is not limited and God's grace sets us all free. Jesus Christ came into this world to show how much God loved this world. God has created us each in His image. We are each His masterpiece, His work of art and He loves us all. We matter to Him and He wants us to enjoy life in all it's fulness. What a better place our world would be, if only we took that truth and truly believed it, not just for ourselves, but for each other. If no one has ever told you, then believe that the Creator of the Universe loves you dearly. As Max Lucado has written, "If God had a refrigerator, then your photograph would be on it." **WE ALL MATTER TO GOD – BELIEVE IT.**

## **PSALM 100**

<sup>1</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

## **LUKE chapter 14 verses 15-24**

<sup>15</sup> When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.'

<sup>16</sup> Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. <sup>17</sup> At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."

<sup>18</sup> 'But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me." <sup>19</sup> 'Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me." <sup>20</sup> 'Still another said, "I have just got married, so I can't come."

<sup>21</sup> 'The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

<sup>22</sup> "Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room."

<sup>23</sup> 'Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup> I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

## **LUKE chapter 15 verses 1 - 32**

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.' <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable:

<sup>4</sup> 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup> 'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins<sup>[a]</sup> and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> 'Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and



kissed him. <sup>21</sup> 'The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." <sup>22</sup> 'But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" So they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> 'Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." <sup>28</sup> 'The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" <sup>31</sup> "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

## MISSION PRAISE 1136 - BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN

Before the world began,  
You were on his mind.  
And every tear you cry,  
Is precious in his eyes.  
Because of his great love,  
He gave his only son.  
Everything was done so you would come.

*Come to the Father,  
though your gift is small.  
Broken hearts, broken lives,  
He will take them all.  
The power of the word,  
the power of his blood.  
Everything was done so you would come.*

Nothing you can do,  
Could make him love you more.  
And nothing that you've done,  
Could make him close the door.  
Because of his great love,  
He gave his only son.  
Everything was done so you would come.

*Come to the Father,  
though your gift is small.  
Broken hearts, broken lives,  
He will take them all.  
The power of the word,  
the power of his blood.  
Everything was done so you would come.*