

WHY BOTHER?

(Luke 15:1-10)

Intro: I was on the walk at the old St. Louis County Jail one afternoon.

-Along the walk were 12 "tanks."

#So called because they were steel plate.

*On the right.

*On the left.

*On the back.

*Even on the ceiling.

#Except for:

*Concrete floor.

*Steel bars on the front.

#The cells were like giant steel tanks.

*Maybe they weren't all that big.

+They were only about as wide.

=As my wing span.

+They were about 30' deep.

+They contained:

=8 bunks.

-Welded to the walls.

=3 tables.

-Bolted to the floor.

=6 chairs.

-Welded to the table.

=1 toilet.

=1 shower.

=1 sink.

=8 people.

-Waiting for their day in court.

-Waiting nine months on average.

-Waiting as much as three years and nine months.

#In one case.

-Waiting in the tanks.

#24 hours a day.

*Except for:

+One hour a week with their social worker.

+Hour or two a week at religious services.

+Hour or two a week in the gym.

=About the size of a volleyball court.

*They spent their entire week.

+Sitting in those tanks.

- As I made my way along the walk in front of the tanks.
- #Briefcase in hand.
- *That was my office.
- #One of the inmates engaged me in conversation.
- *He wasn't:
 - +Belligerent.
 - +Hostile.
- *But he challenged me:
 - + "Why do you come here?"
 - + "Certainly you must have better things to do with your time."
 - + "Why do you bother with us?"
- *I said:
 - + "It's no bother."
 - + "Where else should I be?"

I. In Our Gospel Lesson Jesus Welcomed Sinners And Ate With Them.

A. Pharisees And The Scribes Wondered Why Jesus Bothered With Such Folks.

1. They grumbled.
 - a. Apparently not to Jesus' face.
 - b. Instead they grumbled about him.
 - That's often the way it is with grumblers.
2. They grumbled that Jesus associated with tax collectors and sinners.
 - a. Pharisees did not see themselves as sinners.
 - Sinners were:
 - #Other folks.
 - #Bad folks.
 - b. Among the most notorious were tax collectors.
 - Why did tax collectors get such a bad rap?
 - We need to know something about the political climate.
 - #Palestine at the time of Jesus was ruled by the Romans.
 - *In 63 B.C.
 - +Two Jewish factions were competing for control.
 - =Of the reigns of political power in Israel.
 - +One of those factions asked for help from the Romans.
 - =Hoping the Romans would:
 - Come in.
 - Put down the opposition.
 - Leave them in control.
 - =Romans:
 - Came in under Pompey.
 - Put down both factions.
 - Took over.

#That was the state of affairs when Jesus was born.

*You know the Christmas story.

+ "A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered," (Luke 2: 1).

= Caesar was the Roman emperor.

= Why did he need a census?

- So that he could know how much tax money.

He could expect from his territories.

#But the Romans were clever.

*They didn't collect the taxes directly.

*Instead they engaged in what was known as tax farming.

+ They weren't the first to do this.

= The Egyptians had done it before them.

+ Under this scheme the Romans sold tax "franchises."

= Like a McDonald's franchise.

= Or a Taco Bell franchise.

- Giving the franchisee the right to collect taxes.

In a given region.

+ So the Romans got their money up front.

= Tax collectors then:

- Collected taxes from the folks in their territory.

First of all to reimburse themselves.

* For their franchise fee.

Whatever they collected over and above that.

* Was their profit.

+ So tax collectors were hated for a number of reasons.

= They were cooperating with the Romans.

- Funneling tax money out of the country.

= They were often cheaters.

- Collecting more than their due.

= They, of necessity, dealt with both:

- Jews.

- Gentiles.

Great taboo for Pharisees.

* Who can't comprehend.

+ Why a Jew like Jesus.

+ Would bother with the likes of:

= Tax collectors.

= Sinners.

- B. Why Does God Bother With The Likes Of Us?
1. Do we see ourselves as among the 99?
 - a. Righteous.
 - b. Never straying.
 2. Or did George Friedrich Handel get it right in "The Messiah?"
 - a. "All we like sheep have gone astray?"
 - Not only straying from the straight and narrow ourselves.
 - But begrudging God's mercy to those other "sinners."
 - #Whom God has bothered to find.
 - b. The parables that Jesus tells in Luke 15.
 - Not only about calling sinners to repent.
 - But about calling everyone else to join in the celebration.
 - #When a lost lamb is found.
 - #When a lost coin turns up.
 3. Isn't it comforting to know?
 - a. We can never be so lost.
 - God gives up on us.
 - b. We can never be so lost.
 - God chooses not to bother with us.

II. Why Do We Bother?

- A. Why Do We Bother With The Few At The Expense Of The Many?
1. Why did I bother with law offenders for 28 years?
 2. Why did that mining company in Utah bother?
 - a. With the miners who were lost in the mine when that tunnel collapsed.
 - b. Especially with the risk to the rescuers.
 - 6 of whom were injured.
 - 3 of whom died.
 - #In the rescue effort.
 3. Why are the Search and Rescue folks bothering with Steve Fossett?
 - a. Whose plane disappeared in the Sierra Nevada's on 9-3-07.
 - b. After all, he's just one person.
 4. We bother.
 - a. Because each person is:
 - Valued.
 - Valuable.
 - b. Because each person is somebody's:
 - Child.
 - Spouse.
 - Parent.
 - Colleague.
 - Friend.

B. We Bother Because God Bothered.

1. God bothered enough.
 1. To create each person in God's own image.
 2. To redeem each one through the blood of Jesus.
2. God bothers.
 - a. To welcome us.
 - In the waters of Holy Baptism.
 - b. To eat with us.
 - In the bread and wine of the Holy Supper.
3. God bothered with us when we were lost.
 - a. Have you ever lost something of value?
 - I have.
 - In St. Louis there's a 4th of July celebration.
 - #At the riverfront.
 - #Under the Arch.
 - *Called Fair St. Louis.
 - #There are:
 - *Carnival rides.
 - *Air shows.
 - *Stage productions.
 - +Beach Boys.
 - +Cheryl Crow.
 - +Tony Bennett.
 - =Something for everybody.
 - *Fireworks.
 - #One year when my boys were younger we were there.
 - *I had taken my camera along.
 - +Not just the camera.
 - +But the camera bag.
 - =Camera.
 - =Lenses.
 - =Flash.
 - =Extra film.
 - *There was a show we wanted to see.
 - +Acrobats of China.
 - *We got there early.
 - +So that we'd have a ring-side seat.
 - +We sat down on the grass under the Arch.
 - +I set my camera bag down next to me.
 - =You women who carry purses know about that.
 - *In a few minutes.
 - +Fair officials began to stretch out a rope.
 - =Marking off the space.
 - Where the acrobats would be performing.

+It was apparent we weren't going to be very close to the action.

- =So we got up and moved.
 - So we could be front and center.
 - #Great place from which to watch the show.
 - #Great place from which to take pictures.
- =But when I reached for my camera bag.
 - I got this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.
 - #No camera bag.
 - I looked at my wife.
 - #She didn't have it.
 - I looked at my kids.
 - #They didn't have it.
 - I looked all around where we were sitting.
 - #It was nowhere to be seen.
- =Then it dawned on me what had happened.
 - In our haste to move to a better location.
 - #I had left the camera bag sitting on the ground.
 - Where we had been sitting.
 - #Now a sea of people.
 - *There was no way to move through that crowd.
 - All I could do was wait.
 - #Until the show was over.
 - #Until all of those people got up to leave.
 - *I could go back and look for my camera bag.

*Needless to say I didn't enjoy the acrobats very much.

- +I couldn't stop thinking about that camera.
 - =Not just the camera.
 - It was expensive.
 - But it could be replaced.
 - =But the film.
 - Pictures I had already taken.
 - #Those would be irreplaceable.
- +I had the feeling that I would never see that camera again.
 - =There were thousands of people there.
 - =Anybody could have:
 - Picked it up.
 - Walked off with it.

- *When the show ended and the crowd began to disperse.
 - +We hurried back to where we had first sat down.
 - +We looked:
 - =Up and down.
 - =Back and forth.
 - +That camera was nowhere to be seen.
 - =I had this:
 - Awful.
 - Empty.
 - Stupid.
 - #Feeling.
- *My wife and kids wanted to move on to see a magic show.
 - +I didn't feel like doing much of anything.
 - +I told them to go ahead.
 - =I decided to see.
 - If there wasn't a Lost and Found tent somewhere.
 - =I didn't really think I'd find the camera.
 - But I wasn't ready to give up.
 - =Until I at least checked it out.
- *I walked over to an information booth.
 - +Near where we had been sitting.
 - +I asked if there was a Lost and Found booth around somewhere.
 - +Man asked me what I was looking for.
 - =I told him.
 - Half embarrassed.
 - Half in disgust.
 - # "I lost my camera bag."
 - +He said to me:
 - = "What did it look like?"
 - +My ears perked up right away.
 - = "Why is he asking me these questions?"
 - = "Does he know something about my camera bag?"
 - +I raised my sheepish eyes and I said:
 - = "It looks just like that bag sitting over there on the table."
- *There was my camera bag.
 - +And inside were:
 - =My camera.
 - =My lenses.
 - =My flash.
 - =My film.
 - +It was all there.
 - =Someone had picked it up and turned it in.

- +What a relief!
- =I couldn't wait.
 - To catch up with my family.
 - To tell them the good news.
 - #"I found my camera."
- Do you begin to get a sense of why?
 - #Shepherd would scour the countryside.
 - *In search of one sheep.
 - #Woman would turn her house upside down.
 - *To find one coin.
 - #Jesus would bother to eat with tax collectors and sinners.
 - #Angels in heaven rejoice.
 - *Over one sinner who repents.
- Aren't we more valuable than camera bags?
- b. Have you ever been lost?
 - I have.
 - I was 4 or 5 years old.
 - #We lived in Iowa at the time.
 - *In the country.
 - #One day my parents went into town.
 - *To go shopping.
 - *They took me along.
 - #We went into this huge dime store.
 - *At least it seemed huge to me at the time.
 - *After hanging around my parents for awhile.
 - +I wandered off.
 - =To find something more interesting to look at.
 - *It wasn't too long before I realized.
 - +My mom and dad were nowhere to be seen.
 - *At first I thought:
 - + "They're just in the next aisle."
 - =They weren't.
 - + "The next aisle?"
 - =Not there, either.
 - *I began to panic.
 - +I raced:
 - =Up and down each aisle.
 - =Back and forth across the store.
 - I didn't see them anywhere.
 - +I thought they'd left the store.
 - =I ran through the front door.
 - Out onto the sidewalk.
 - #Hoping to catch a glimpse of them.
 - *Before they disappeared.

=I looked to the left.
=I looked to the right.
-No mom.
-No dad.
*In tears I went back into the store.
+Not knowing what else to do.
+There my parents found me.
=They assured me they'd been there all the time.
-But I couldn't see them.
#I was lost.
+They weren't lost.
=I was lost.
+I didn't find them.
=They found me.
*What a relief!
+I wanted to celebrate.

Concl: How about here?
How about now?

-Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.
-The lost are found.
#It's cause to celebrate.
#It's no bother.