

SERMON FOR SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 15: 1-10

THEME: FINDING THE LOST

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

In the name of Jesus:

In my forty years living here in Lancaster, I have lost a great many things. I have lost two dogs, my glasses, my wallet, my credit cards, my car in the hospital parking garage, and I have even gotten lost when trying to find a home in Lancaster and Fairfield County. Fortunately I have not lost my wife, my children, my grandchildren, or my mind in the process of trying to find everything that I have lost. In all of my experiences of losing things, I know this, there is great joy when I find them!

In the Gospel lesson for today, Luke records two stories that Jesus told. Luke 15 has been called the lost chapter of the Bible, in that Jesus tells three stories in the chapter all about lost things being found. You know well the story of the Lost son who was found, that is known as the story of the Prodigal Son, which is the Gospel lesson for next week. Today Jesus tells two stories about lost things being found, lost sheep, and a lost coin. Jesus shares with us these two stories to tell us how valuable people are to our Lord. They are stories about FINDING THE LOST,

The chapter is set among tax collectors and sinners. Jesus is found associating with what was considered at that time the dregs of society. This was a difficult thing for the people in Jesus' day to imagine, God associating and hanging out with sinners. But lo and behold that is what Jesus loves to do, He wants to be with sinners! I can just picture our Lord smiling when He is with His people. And you would think that this would be a reason to celebrate, anytime God is in the midst of His people. But think again! There was no cause for rejoicing on this day! Just listen to what Luke records: "the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." They were grumbling and complaining! Why? It is because God was hanging around people who were not like them, who didn't

look like them, and who didn't act like them! Certainly God loves sinners, but He can't love THAT SINNER!

The Bible says that God's will is simple: He wants all to be saved and come to know the truth. That is why we are here, because God wants to be with us! This is His House, His Place, and He says that where two or three are gathered there He is in the midst of them. That is a reason for us to rejoice

But God wants others here too. He wants us to invite our friends, those we associate with, and even those we don't associate with. He wants people to come to Him, those who look like us, and those who don't. He wants us to invite all sorts of people to Church. This is our purpose, our mission, and Jesus' mission. Jesus even says so when He summarizes His mission as being one of "seeking and saving the lost." (Luke 19:10). And these two stories in our Gospel lesson for today get to the heart of Jesus' mission. God seeks the lost, no matter who that person is. If you have fallen away from God, Jesus is calling you back. If your neighbor is lost, Jesus is calling them to come home. Jesus seeks the lost sheep, and Jesus seeks the lost coin. Jesus seeks and pursues everyone so that all might have eternal salvation.

God wants us to go out and invite the lost, though who don't know Jesus, to come to know Him. This is an intentional action. Think of it this way: in

the case of a lost sheep, the sheep isn't crying out saying: "Hey, I am lost, find me." It is a case, rather, of going out and finding that which is lost.

That is what I had to do when our two dogs were lost. We didn't lose them at the same time, they wandered off on different days and not on the same year. When we discovered that our dogs were lost, each and every time it was a circumstance of it being all hands on deck. Luann, I and the kids went out throughout the neighborhood seeking our lost pet, calling out for them, in hopes that they would hear us. They weren't screaming, "hey I am lost." They were lost, didn't know they were lost, and we had to go looking for them to find them. We didn't stop looking for them until we found them. And when we did, there was great joy in our home.

Similarly, when I lost my wallet, it didn't cry out: "I am lost, here I am." It was silent, and like the woman in our text who was searching for the lost coin, when we lost a wallet we end up turning over furniture and tearing the house apart until we find it.

It is the same in the church. There are lost people all around us. Rather standing on the side judging Jesus, like the Pharisees do in our text, we stand on the sidelines wringing our hands. We aren't sure how to reach them. We see spaces in the pews where former members used to be and we wonder

why. We see children who were raised in the church and don't go to church and we want to reach out, but don't know what to say or do.

And that is precisely the point that Jesus is making today. The Shepherd, Jesus, continues to seek the lost sheep, the lost coin, so that the lost will be found. Even though we may wring our hands and don't know what to do or say, Jesus says that God hasn't given up. Jesus knows His own. The Shepherd goes out to find lost sheep, and comes back with what He is searching for. The Shepherd doesn't come back with a pig or a cow, but the sheep that was lost. The lost is found! Because Jesus is the Shepherd who keeps on looking for His lost sheep.

Jesus knows your name, He called you by name in Baptism. You who were once lost are now found. And now Jesus, who knows you, knows those around you as well. He knows your neighbor, your friend, your child, your co-worker, He knows them by name. He has the hair on their heads numbered. He loves and cares deeply for you and for them. Jesus came down from heaven to live, die, and rise again for sinners, you and me, and yes, for those who don't believe in Him.

And so Jesus places us in relationships among the lost. They may be family members who once attended church but have now fallen away. They can be neighbors who see us going to church every Sunday who are either

sitting on their front porch or still under the covers asleep. They may be coworkers, people we know, and people we know only in passing. They are people who we know, who God has placed in our path, to be the face, voice and presence of Jesus.

So what can you do? You can pray for them. You can bring them to the altar during the Lord's Supper today, for Jesus is here present. Bring them here, and place them at Jesus' feet, asking Jesus to use you to touch them and reach them. And as you do, then watch and notice what God is doing and what God will do. For God will truly be at work, not only searching for those He loves, but using us to reach those He loves, bringing them to faith and the joys of eternal salvation. For FINDING THE LOST is what our loving God is all about. May God grant it to His glory and in Jesus' name.

Amen