

Text: Luke 15:1-10

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ 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 persons who do not need to repent. ⁸ “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” – NIV84

Prayer of the Day

Lord, we pray that Your mercy and grace may always go before and follow after us, that loving You with undivided hearts, we may be ready for every good and useful work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day

Alleluia. There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Alleluia. (John 15:10)

Sermon Text:

Lost and Found. I believe every single school, perhaps every institution has one. Ours isn't bad right now. School has only just begun. But by the end of the school year, the table outside the office will have a number of items left unclaimed. I can only assume that because of the many practices that will have come and gone there will be entire outfits left behind: Shirts, pants, shoes, snow gear, rain gear, sports gear. It will all be present. We think that forgetfulness is only a trait we pick up as we age but in truth, it has always been present to varying degrees within our lives. So we have them, Lost and Found locations at just about every place people frequent.

Have you ever been lost? Living in a world of GPS in every cellular phone perhaps it happens less frequently, but every so often we can get caught in the no man's land of recalculating. It feels hopeless, helpless, and for some even terrifying.

I can still recall the first time my father handed me the map as we prepared to head to relatives across the country. It was time for me to learn how to use it. I would be the navigator. I was honored but I was also terrified. Visions of ending up in Canada instead of Iowa danced through my head the entire trip. While absolutely good for me, there were times I felt lost, hopeless, helpless.

Perhaps that's why we use it as a metaphor in life. When someone has traveled far down the rocky roads of sin, wandering around no longer anchored to the sure and solid foundation of law, God's law is supposed to be designed to help and not harm. “He's lost”, we might say. Someone needs to help them “find their way”. It must not simply be an American saying for Jesus uses it also as He presents these twin parables (they are really triplets if we include the prodigal son but that parable is famous enough to remain untethered to these two today). As we contemplate them, Jesus reminds us that “lostness” is not an uncommon thing. It is the finding which brings great rejoicing in heaven.

I asked the question before but it bears repeating. Have you ever been lost? Not physically, not emotionally, but the kind of “lost” that Jesus refers to here in our lesson. As Christians, maybe even lifelong Christians in many cases, we don't recall such a time when we were outside the comfortable

confines of Faith. But I find it interesting that Jesus' parables speak of things that were at least at one time not lost. The sheep had its pen, the coin was secured in the purse with the others. What happened?

Isaiah 53:6 tells us, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each has turned to his own way.*" Six chapters later he announces, "*your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*" We like to believe that sin is no big deal. We like to think that it's like hot sauce. If I only add small amounts then it only spices up life. It's only when I pour in the bottle that it sets the mouth on fire. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Sin separates us from God, even in small amounts until one day we lift our heads from the spice of life to realize we no longer know where we are, lost in the wilderness of sin. It would pry us from the comfortable confines of God's Word to roll around in the dusty floors of unbelief until we come to rest separated from those who would show us real love and point us back to God. Have you ever been lost, suffocated by sin, overcome with doubt or despair? As a sinner, the answer is yes.

But that's why these parables are so wonderful. You see Jesus doesn't say, "Oh well, I have other sheep." Or "No biggie, I have coins a plenty." In both cases, as He describes the kingdom of heaven everything stops. Everything stops so that the careful search can be made so that He, through His church, through His people, through His Word might lovingly reach out to the lost. Consider His cry to his wayward people through the prophet Ezekiel, "*As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?*" Or what of that extreme picture played out in the actual life of Hosea the prophet as he returns again and again to his wayward wife, pulling her from dens of iniquity, buying her back, taking her home to be his wife once more. This is God's love for you. Even in our sinfulness, our lostness, He comes to us, for us, finds us that we might turn from our sin and back to the forgiveness won on the cross. Talk about crazy extreme pictures played out in life. Jesus loves us so much that He literally dies for us on the cross so that our sinfulness, hopelessness, and despair might be shattered in the bright rays of forgiveness and eternal peace on Easter morning. For you dear Christian, for you dear brother or sister in Christ, there was and is great rejoicing in heaven. They are excited to have you. The once lost one who is now found.

Do you suppose that might make us look at others around us just a little differently? I know, it is ever so easy to jump on the bandwagon of us vs. them when we view the world around us. Unfortunately, sometimes while we follow Jesus' advice to be shrewd as snakes, we bite like them too. It's easy to huddle in the pen with the 99 rather than leave those comfortable confines in search of the one. Lighting lamps, sweeping floors, crawling around on our hands and knees, it's no fun, maybe even a bit degrading in our eyes. But if Jesus was willing to that, and so much more for us, perhaps we should look down our noses just a bit less as we look out at the world and in love reach out to them. Yes, reach out with God's Law to show them just how lost they truly are, how far they have departed from the safety God would supply for them therein but only because we truly wish to pick them up and lovingly restore them in the faith which only God provides and strengthens. Because we know that the rejoicing will only grow ever louder, ever brighter, ever more joyous and rich with another voice added to the fold.

Those lost and found tables, I can only imagine that much of it is comprised of items children end up not wanting anymore. Something truly treasured would have been scooped back up as the careful search was made. I guess it's not a big deal if it's a pair of pants that were on the verge of outgrowth anyway. A glove with one too many holes to keep the cold out effectively any longer. But thanks be to God, that in our lostness, He didn't leave us lay. He came to us Lost in sin and called us His found and beloved people. May we not walk away from our community or world, even if it seems to be wandering away, rolling away from us. Dear friends may we as the lost and found, seek the lost, that they might be found with us forever in heaven. Let the rejoicing begin. Amen!