

Exodus 32:7-14
1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-10

Jesus' critics were at it again. The Pharisees and the scribes always seemed to have something to complain about. Today it's about the company he kept, and who joined him for dinner. In true Jesus fashion, he responded with parables. There are some that we don't hear as often, or at least we don't remember as well. But these passages stay with us. We've heard them many times, from when we were young. It's easy to hear but not think about them.

Jesus responded to his critics by asking, "Which one of you... does not go after the one sheep that is lost until he finds it?" (*Luke 15:4*) "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them... does not... search carefully until she finds it?" (*Luke 15:8*)

What? No! Of course not. Let's be logical - some things are more important than others. When a shepherd had a whole flock of 100 sheep and one disappeared, there's no way he would leave the 99 to fall prey to predators while he searched for the missing one. And as the woman's coin - we don't know what kind of coin it was, or how its value compared to others. It could have been a penny set aside a fortune! I lose little things - like pens or quarters - often enough that I certainly don't tear the house apart looking for them. If so, I would spend all my time in such endeavors. I already spend too much time searching for essential things, like missing car keys, which I really can't live without! I would be paralyzed and unable to do anything if I searched for every little item with that dedication.

Jesus asked the questions in a way that seemed to assume that the crowd would agree with him. Yet what he asked did not make plain sense – to us or to them. He was not expecting them to agree with him. Instead, his parable called them to reconsider their normal ways in God’s light. Indeed, Jesus tells us all his parables to teach us about the kingdom of God.

In the kingdom of God, each sheep has great value. When one is lost, the shepherd doesn’t ask the others where he or she went. The shepherd does not stay with the herd and call out, inviting the lost sheep to return to its community. No, he drops everything, and searches, high and low. Finally, he discovers a very scared sheep, fearful of the wilderness and the dangers around it.

Like the icon of the Great Shepherd, the shepherd places it on his shoulders in a position of rest and protection. You’ll notice that there is no word of threat or scolding. The shepherd’s respond is one of dedication and love and joy. When they arrive home, calls his friends to join him. For the lost has been found!



Where are you in this parable? I’ve certainly felt lost before – though thankfully my times were not as bizarre as the television series, “LOST.” It does not take much to meander from ways of life and faith. We find ourselves in uncertain territory, in dark, unknown wilderness.

In kingdom logic, God loves us each as treasured people. God would drop everything to find us, and reach out to us. To pick us up and carry us home on safe, secure shoulders. God’s discovery is not filled with threats or scolding, or demands of repentance. It is a meeting of pure joy and celebration and life.

In the first letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul wrote of his experience of this wonderful, extravagant grace of God’s. “... [E]ven though [Paul] was formerly a

blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 1:13-14) Paul’s language speaks of being overwhelmed with God’s love. In that, we hear his confession of what he had been. For a man of faith, a good Jew, we can only imagine his grief and pain when he his eyes were opened. (Entertainingly, that all started when Paul’s eyes were blinded...) It must have been shocking for him to realize that when he thought he had been serving God faithfully, he had really been doing the opposite.

Encountering God’s love can hurt like that. We see ourselves and our world through a lens of possibility shown to us by God. We hear God’s call to turn a different direction, or to embrace new, life-giving ways in our lives. It hurts to leave behind what we know.



Jesus reaches out to each of us today. The Holy Spirit comes to us, in each of our souls’ lost places.

Our congregation has also been lost for a little while. We remember days of full pews and plenty. We mourn the deaths of cherished members. Some wounded relationships among us are still healing. Our financial problems have not gone away. It seems that we will use what remains in our Memorial Investment account in the coming months.

Yet Christ’s ministry to the world was – and is – not dependent on money at all. Loving the oppressed and downtrodden calls for a full heart, not a fat bank account. Sharing God’s gift of freedom from the bounds of sin and death, does not require us to be bound by debt, as so much of our society is. Seeking the lost does not involve a building at all, even though this one is beautiful. The shepherd left his

field, and went out to search for the lost. The early church was faithful and beautiful, despite the “things” that they lacked.

The Spirit of Jesus reaches out to us, in the ways in which we are lost, and fills us with God’s presence and love. We are being healed of our wounds and sorrow. We are being knit together in blessed relationships. God calls us to new life in our community, as the body of Christ. We don’t know what that will look like yet. But we, and our council members, and our friends in Christ (Lutheran and otherwise), are praying and listening and imagining holy possibilities. There will be a time when we will have choices, though they may be difficult ones. God has a future planned for us, a future of grace and love, for us as a people.

We have been found and welcomed into the love of God. Rejoice and be glad! Prepare for Christ’s feast of thanksgiving and joy! Prepare to be fed, so that we may seek and find others who are lost. Amen.