

The Lost One

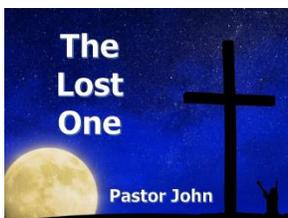
September 11, 2016

Luke 15: 1-10:

Tax collectors and sinners were all crowding around to listen to Jesus. ² So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses started grumbling, "This man is friendly with sinners. He even eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this story: ⁴ If any of you has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, what will you do? Won't you leave the ninety-nine in the field and go look for the lost sheep until you find it? ⁵ And when you find it, you will be so glad that you will put it on your shoulder ⁶ and carry it home. Then you will call in your friends and neighbors and say, "Let's celebrate! I've found my lost sheep." ⁷ Jesus said, "In the same way there is more happiness in heaven because of one sinner who turns to God than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to."

⁸ Jesus told the people another story: What will a woman do if she has ten silver coins and loses one of them? Won't she light a lamp, sweep the floor, and look carefully until she finds it? ⁹ Then she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, "Let's celebrate! I've found the coin I lost." ¹⁰ Jesus said, "In the same way God's angels are happy when even one person turns to him."



Today we begin with a story. The boss of a big company needed to call one of his employees about an urgent problem with one of the main computers. He dialed the employee's home telephone number and was greeted with a child's whispered, "Hello?"

Feeling put out at the inconvenience of having to talk to a child, the boss asked, "Is your Daddy home?" "Yes," whispered the small voice. "May I talk with him?" the man asked. To the surprise of the boss, the small voice whispered, "No."

Wanting to talk with an adult, the boss asked, "Is your Mommy there?" "Yes," came the answer. "May I talk with her?" Again, the small voice whispered, "No."

Knowing that it was not likely that a young child would be left home alone, the boss decided he would just leave a message with the person who should be there watching over the child. "Is there anyone there besides you?" the boss asked the child. "Yes," whispered the child, "a policeman."

Wondering what a cop would be doing at his employee's home, the boss asked, "May I speak with the policeman?" "No, he is busy," whispered the child. "Busy doing what?" asked the boss. "Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the Fireman," came the whispered answer.

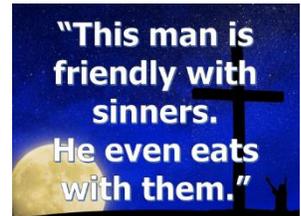
Growing concerned and even worried as he heard what sounded like a helicopter through the ear piece on the phone, the boss asked, "What is that noise?" "A hello-copper," answered the whispering voice. "What is going on there?" asked the boss, now alarmed. In an awed whispering voice, the child answered, "The search team just landed the hello-copper!"

Alarmed, concerned and more than just a little frustrated, the boss asked, "Why are they there?" Still whispering, the young voice replied (along with a muffled giggle), "They are looking for me!" ... Let us pray.

How often does this scenario play out in our relationship with Jesus? How often do we know Jesus is just right there, but we pretend to be hiding or to act as if Jesus was not really there? In my mind, I see the boss in the story as the Holy

Spirit. In our lives, the Holy Spirit tries to nudge us and to whisper into our lives, guiding us to make good choices, to follow the path Jesus calls us to walk. And at times, like the little boy with the boss, do you think we exasperate the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit wants to speak to the holy inside, to draw out the part of us that makes good decisions, the part of us that walks as Jesus calls us to walk.

Our passage today begins with sinners and tax collectors gathering around Jesus. You know, in reality, who needs Jesus more? Who could possibly need to hear the words of Jesus more than sinners? But the religious authorities, watching from the edge of the scene, start grumbling and say to each other, *"This man is friendly with sinners. He even eats with them."* How could He?



We laugh at such a thought. Of course sinners need Jesus more than anyone else. But to the religious authorities, the sinners and tax collectors are people they would not associate with. Sinners and tax collectors are people who would be shunned or ignored if they came to the temple. They would feel very unwelcome if they appeared for worship. In response to their disgust, Jesus tells two stories to help the religious authorities to begin to understand what it means to love others as yourself. Jesus wants them to see how they can draw the circle just a little bigger than they are currently comfortable drawing it.



Jesus uses two examples that the sinners and tax collectors AND the religious authorities could relate to. We are two thousand years removed from these illustrations, but they

certainly strike a chord with us as well. Just think about the last time you could not find your car keys or your cell phone. You abandon all else, no matter what you are doing, and search until you find the lost object. Whatever you were doing gets dropped and you become obsessed with finding the cell phone or the car keys. So we can understand why the shepherd leaves the 99 and why the woman lights the lamp and sweeps the house. We have been there too.

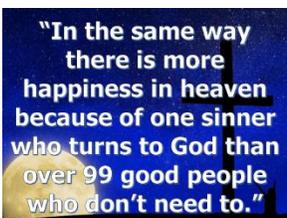
If we dig a little deeper, though, we find there is more to the story. For shepherds, the standard practice was to count the sheep each night when they brought them into the pen so that they knew all the sheep were there. So as



our shepherd counts his sheep, he realizes that there is one sheep missing. It must be found. The shepherd would first find someone to watch the 99, to sit in the opening in the pen. Then he leaves them safe and sound in the pen and

goes out to find the one lost sheep. The shepherd would search until he found the sheep or the remains of the sheep.

In our story, his search is fruitful and he joyously returns with the lost sheep. He calls out for his friends to come and celebrate with him. The lost has been found!! All gathered around Jesus would nod and smile approvingly that the lost sheep has been found; all ends well. But then Jesus goes on to draw an analogy for those in the audience: *"In the same way there is more happiness in heaven*



because of one sinner who turns to God than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to." Can you picture Jesus

looking at the religious authorities as He says? And can you picture the sinners and tax collectors looking over at the

religious authorities, nodding in agreement with Jesus' analogy?



Our second story is very similar. The end line is slightly different, but the basic story and message are the same. The woman loses a coin. She searches and searches until she finds it. There is again much rejoicing that the lost has been

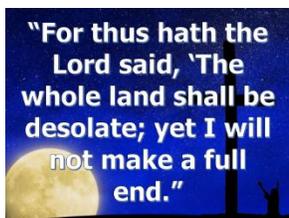
found and Jesus ends the story by saying, *"In the same way God's angels are happy when even one person turns to him."*

Each story in today's text celebrates when one person turns to God. In both cases, the sheep and the coin were with the owner, but became lost. Following the analogies, both were connected to God, but became lost. In the end, both came back to God and there was much celebration. For me, I can very much relate to this story. Friends, perhaps you can too. This is a common part of our faith journey.

I was like the sheep and the coin. As far back as I can remember, church has been a part of my life. As a little child I can remember my folks leading the high school MYF group in our home on Sunday evenings. I can remember being a part of church throughout high school. In college I drifted like most do. Nothing too radical though. When I would come home on weekends and during the summers, I would go to church almost every Sunday. But that was about it during my college years. After college I returned to the church and Kristin and I attended pretty regularly. When we moved to South Dakota we went to a little Lutheran church near Hot Springs. I am sure God was pleased that we were in church, but it was partial engagement at best. Sunday mornings was about it for me. I was still connected but my commitment level was pretty minimal.

I took a new teaching position in Rapid City in 1993 and we began attending a Methodist church. I became friends with a few fellow teachers that first year. At the church Kristin and I began to get involved in a couple's group and I started to help out by teaching Sunday school. I could sense God was becoming more active in my life and that I was growing in my faith. Part of me felt like I was one of the 99 or the nine. But part of me felt like I was also partly the one who was lost. My new friends were pulling me in directions that created conflict within me. At least a part of me was lost for that first year in Rapid City. We would go out for a beer after practice. We would go golfing a couple times a week during the summer and usually ended up at a casino. I was too cheap to gamble but I was along with them. As the year progressed and I was moving one way at church, a part of me was moving in another direction. When I was with Bill, Dave, and Craig, I was definitely lost.

Jeremiah 4 reminds me of this season in my life. This passage speaks of a time when Israel was far from the Lord. False idols and the culture around them was causing them to lose focus on God. The prophet declared that destruction was on the horizon. In the summer of 1994, I could sense that I was nearing a crossroads. God was calling me one way and my friends were leading me another way. In verse 27, we read this proclamation from God: "*For thus hath*



the LORD said, "The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end." Even though desolation lay ahead, God was not done with the chosen people. Even though there would be weeping and mourning, it was not the end.

Even though we may make choices that do not honor God and even though we make decisions that displease God, God is never done with us. Psalm 51 speaks of the unending mercy of God. It speaks of our sin and how God makes us makes us clean again. Reading verses one through seven:

"¹You are kind, God! Please have pity on me. You are always merciful! Please wipe away my sins. ² Wash me clean from all of my sin and guilt. ³ I know about my sins, and I cannot forget my terrible guilt. ⁴ You are really the one I have sinned against; I have disobeyed you and have done wrong. So it is right and fair for you to correct and punish me. ⁵ I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born. ⁶ But you want complete honesty, so teach me true wisdom. ⁷ Wash me with hyssop until I am clean and whiter than snow."

Even though part of me was connected to God through the church, a part of me was also far from God. Yet the Holy Spirit was always nudging, always whispering, always seeking to keep me on the path God that was calling me to. God was not done with me. God is never done with any of us. No matter how far we wander, no matter where we stray, no matter how many times we are disobedient, God always welcomes us back. God's unending mercy always cleanses us. God is never done with us. God is never done with us.



At times we will all find ourselves lost. Maybe some of us here now are a bit lost. Thanks be to God that the Holy Spirit is at work in each of us, calling us back, seeking to reclaim us when we are lost. Our reality is that right now, as a church, we have some who are truly 'lost'. Some used to be in the flock, but are not now.

If you take a moment right now, you can think of someone or some family that needs to be reconnected to God. They are adrift from the way, the truth, and the life. Our challenge with these lost ones is to act as the shepherd. Our challenge is to leave the walls of this place and to go out into the wilderness to bring them back into the fold. Our challenge is to help them hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. May it be so this week. Let us pray...