

17th Sunday after Pentecost
"God's Never-ending Love"
Luke 15:1-10
9-15-13

Today, I want to talk with you about an experience I think everyone can relate to at one time or another. How many of you have ever lost something?
How many of you have found something that was lost for a long time?

Isn't it true, that few experiences in life arouse stronger feelings than when something valuable is lost? Think about the stories we hear on the news.

A lost child is headline news.

If a child wanders off into the woods gets lost in a forest hundreds of people turn out to comb every square inch of land, until that child is found.

When aviator Steve Fossett's plane crashed somewhere in the Sierra's the National Guard, rescue crews and private pilots searched the area where they thought his plane went down. Organizers estimate the effort cost over \$600,000.
When someone is lost no expense is spared to find them.

This morning the reason we're talking about things that are lost and found is to give us a little introduction to the parables we find in our Gospel reading for today.

In Luke, chapter 15, we find three parable on this theme:

- the parable of the lost sheep
- the parable of the lost coin
- and the parable of the lost son, or Prodigal Son

Today, we are going to look at the first two: the lost sheep, and lost coin.
But first, I want to explain a little about the setting in which we find these parables.
We're going to look at the specific situation Jesus was addressing.

So listen closely, again to the first two verses of Chapter 15.

"Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying: 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

The Pharisees were threatened by Jesus. He was pointing out their hypocrisy. And he was threatening their power and influence, the source of their wealth.

And so here, in verse 2, Luke tells us that the Pharisees thought they had finally found Jesus' weakness...the chink in his armor.

They were thinking, “Why would this devout and Holy man, break our religious rules just to spend time with these low-lives, these outcasts tax collectors and worse!

So in answer to these criticisms Jesus responded by telling these parables.

First the parable of the Lost Sheep.

⁴Which one of you,” Jesus said:

having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷Just 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.

I'm curious... I know we live in Orange County, but raise your hand if you have ever raised either a farm animal?

Okay. Now raise your hand if you have a dog or a cat?

Thinking about the loyalty people have to their pets gives you some idea of the kind of devotion shepherds had for their sheep. Shepherds in the Middle East, even today, often give each of their sheep a name. They carefully protect their flock from predatory animals. They make sure that flock has enough food and water. And when one gets separated from the flock, they retrace their steps looking for the lost sheep.

Well, in this parable we see three things Jesus is trying to teach us about God.

First, like the Shepherd who searches for the one lost sheep out of ninety-nine we are each so important to God, that if we lose our way and become lost God will never give up on us.

Second, if you turn away from God, if you used to be close to God at one time in our life, but for one reason or another you've gotten off track...or if you grew up in a home, where you never really got to know God...God will search for you, God will continue to go out time after time, calling your name, until you are found.

And third, every person is so precious in God's sight, that when they are found, God rejoices. When we turn away we cause God sorrow, but when we are found, God's heart overflows with joy.

Now let's look at the 2nd Parable: The Parable of the Lost Coin.

As I read it again, listen especially for how you think this parable is similar to the parable of the Lost Sheep.

Jesus said,

⁸Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?

⁹When 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.'

¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Here are the similarities I see:

In both parables we see the great joy of God when the lost is found.

Both parables involve a passionate search.

And both explain to us why Jesus associated with tax collectors and sinners:

Because we are all sinners, and everyone... everyone is precious to God.

After 9/11, one woman who had lost her only son in the attack on the Pentagon shared this story:

The night after the attack in the midst of incredible grief she had a dream.

An angel stood before her and said,

"If you could have your son back for 10 minutes, which 10 minutes would you choose?"

Would you have him back as little baby, to hold in your arms?

Would you have him back on his first day of school, so grown up, and yet still your little boy?

Would you have him back when he celebrated his high school graduation,

or when he enlisted to serve his country?

In her dream, the mother thought for a few minutes, and then

told the angel she would choose none of those times.

"Let me have him back, when as a little boy, in moment of anger,

he doubled up his fists and shook them at me and said,

'Mom, I hate you. I hate you.'

Continuing to address the angel, she said,

"In a little while his anger subsided and he came back to me,

his dirty little face stained with tears, and put his arms around me.

"Momma, I'm sorry I was so naughty.

I promise never to be bad again, and I will love you with all my heart."

"Let me have him back then," the mother sobbed,

"I never loved him more than at that moment."

Think about that mother
and think about how God sees us.

We are more precious to God, than we will ever know.

And there is nothing that makes God rejoice, more
than when we see God's love,
and trust God's love,
and we come back to Him.

If we are lost or far from him,
we know that God never gives up on us,
that He keeps searching...
from our birth through our old age...

...through the love of our parents,
...the love of our Sunday School teachers, youth Leaders, and mentors
...through the love of friends who share their faith with us.

God keeps searching and reaching out
...until the day
when our hearts find their one true home in Jesus. Amen.