

**Pastor Mollie's Sermon**  
**September 15, 2019**  
**"The Rescued Party", Luke 15:1-10**

How many of you have ever lost something important like your car keys...turned the house upside down searching, only to find the car keys in your pocket?

How many of you have ever carefully put away something valuable in a place where you knew it would be safe,

only to forget where you put it?

How many of you have been driving to a place where you have been before, sure that you knew the way and needed no directions,

only to become hopelessly lost?

Being lost, or losing something important is not fun! In our Gospel, Jesus tells two stories about being lost.

The first story is about a sheep that has been separated from the rest of the flock.

It is lost. The shepherd leaves the other 99 sheep and goes looking for the one that was lost.

And when he finds the one lost sheep he throws a party!

The second story is about a woman who has lost one of her ten coins.

(In the homes that people lived in back then it would be easy to lose a coin. Houses were dark, usually lit by a single oil lamp. They had dirt floors covered with reeds and grass)

Looking for a lost coin would not be easy.

Yet the woman looks relentlessly for the one lost coin and when she finds it she throws a party!

Being lost, or losing something important is not fun!

There's an old story about a farmer out looking for a lost sheep.

He's walked for miles when he comes upon a city fellow.

The city "slicker" says: "What you doin' old timer?"

"One of the sheep's lost. I'm tryin' to get it back."

The city fellow offers to drive him and the two go off searching together.

After a while the city "slicker" asks: "Why do they run off? Don't you take good care of them?"

"Oh, they don't run off," said the farmer.

"They get lost by nibbles." "Huh? What'd you mean?"

"Yeah, they nibble a little here and then there's a hole in the fence.

They nibble a little there, then something delicious across the road catches their eye and before long they've just nibble themselves lost."

I think that is a good metaphor for us at times.

We just "nibble ourselves lost".

There are a variety of ways that a person can be lost.

Some people are spiritually lost.

We are spiritually lost if

we have no connection or a broken connection with God.

And we're just empty and feel so terribly alone.

Another way of being lost is what I would call "wandering in the wilderness"

At one point, we have experienced God's love and presence, but for some reason it feels like God is silent or maybe even feels absent from our lives.  
We find ourselves wondering in the wilderness.  
Some of us may feel lost because we have failed.  
Maybe it was a job, or a relationship, or a dream that was an important part of your life, but you failed.  
Probably the most tragic kind of lostness is not knowing you  
are lost.  
The Pharisees had that kind of lostness.  
They thought they were righteous.  
They were God's chosen people. Their smug self-righteousness was nothing more than a cover-up for their actually being lost.  
They really thought they didn't need God!  
In whatever way we may be lost, it is not fun!  
But there is Good News in our Gospel today.  
First, the stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin underscore the importance, the value, of every individual, every person in God's eyes.  
The shepherd searched high and low for ONE lost sheep!  
The woman turned her house upside down to find just ONE lost coin!  
You see, God almost has an obsession about each and everyone of his children.  
He doesn't want to lose a single one. Each one of us is irreplaceable.  
And if one of us becomes lost, God will go to great lengths to find that ONE lost child and bring him or her back.  
Every single person, every child of God, has a value in God's  
eyes that is beyond our human comprehension!  
But wait... there's more!  
Jesus not only teaches us that God is madly in love with every one of us,  
but also that God will do everything in God's power to search for us and find us.  
Notice that the parable does not say "if the shepherd finds the sheep."  
It says "when the shepherd finds the sheep."  
It doesn't say "if the woman finds the coin."  
It says "when she finds the coin."  
God searches for us until we are found! Jesus came to find us.  
No matter how lost we may feel, we are never beyond God's  
ability to find us.  
So often, when we feel lost, we feel as if it is all up to us.  
We'd better find a way, or so we think, to save ourselves, to dig ourselves out of our lostness.  
The truly Good News is that God takes the initiative to find  
us—to save us!  
The sheep was all alone in the wilderness.  
The coin was at a place it should not have been.  
Neither the lost sheep or the lost coin could do anything to save themselves.  
It is only through the persistence of the shepherd that the sheep is rescued.  
It is only through the resolve, the determination of the woman who lost the coin, that the coin is found.  
It is through God's initiative that we are found!

There is not a single word in our Gospel about earning or deserving to be found.  
God reaches out to us.  
It does not matter how far we may have “nibbled ourselves lost”,  
how far we’ve strayed, how lost we’ve become.  
God is looking for us and longing to welcome us home.  
A friend told me a story recently about a time when he was working at a grocery store stocking  
the shelves.  
He was rotating the stock with another co-worker when they saw a young mother with a baby in  
the shopping cart,  
a baby on her hip and a toddler walking beside her.  
She looked tired and rundown as she shopped  
and the young boy that was walking beside her didn’t stay there for long.  
My friend decided to “shadow him” – just in case.  
As he followed the little boy it was like following Billy from Family Circus...  
with the dotted lines showing his crazy journey.  
The boy walked all the aisles, was in the meat cooler,  
he was everywhere and at one point he looked up and my friend knew that this boy realized that  
he could no longer see his mother,  
she was at the end of an aisle that was not so visible to him  
and so he started running up and down the aisles looking for her –  
he was so fast that my friend couldn’t catch up to him  
to reassure him that he knew where his mother was.  
Finally the boy spotted his mom,  
as she was examining an item to buy, the boy approached her and said to her with a huge sigh of  
relief  
“Don’t worry mommy, I found you.”  
Like she was the one that was lost!  
Sometimes we say that to God,  
we have found God – like God was lost and not us.  
When in reality, we are the ones that wander and God continues to seek us out.  
When we are lost, our God never stops loving us, searching  
for us, seeking us out, calling our name.  
This bread and wine, this party is a party for the lost who have been found.  
It is God’s way of saying: “Whatever you have done, whatever  
you have become, however you may have been lost, it doesn’t  
matter. I love you... Welcome home”