



## **Lost & Found**

Sunday, September 11, 2016

Pastor Dave Schultz

### **Gospel Lesson, Luke 15:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### **Sermon, “Lost and Found”**

This past Tuesday morning, we began our study of *Everyday Epiphanies* by James Harnish. By the way, it’s not too late for you to come and join us; in the words of Karen

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Carpenter, “We’ve only just begun.” We won’t have white lace and promises for you, but we will have coffee and a copy of *Everyday Epiphanies* for only \$13. We begin at 9 am and we wrap up at 10:30. I hope to see you here.

Here’s how James Harnish begins chapter one:

I don’t have the faintest idea how my GPS works. I’m totally baffled by the concept of a perfectly coordinated constellation of satellites that I will never find in the night sky but which find me wherever I am, pick up the direction I’m going, and set me on the best route to reach my destination. I still make wrong turns and get off course almost as often as I did in the old days, when my wife and I navigated with a paper map. Our marriage somehow survived the way she would fold the map back on itself while I insisted that it be folded neatly, the way we received it. It didn’t help that in stereotypically misdirected male pride, I refused to ask for directions until we had no other option. I didn’t want to confess that I needed help from someone who knew what I didn’t know. GPS may have helped save our marriage!

Remember those days before GPS devices? It was so easy to get lost. I learned from experience that there are two kinds of lost. The first kind of lost is when you know you’re lost. I’ve had that happen before, and you have, too.

The second kind of lost is when you don’t even realize that you are lost. Years ago, I came home from a meeting on the other side of the state. I was enjoying the music on the radio a little too much when I realized I had driven 50 miles south on I-57 toward Effingham when I had intended to drive west on I-72. I was lost and didn’t even know it.

Both kinds of lost share one common trait, and that is once you realize that you are lost, you become a “seeker.” You will begin seeking the right path. And that’s what we find in today’s Gospel lesson.

Luke 15 is all about being lost and found. Jesus speaks of a lost sheep and a lost coin. The coin certainly has no capacity for saying, “Hey, I’m lost!” The coin has no capacity for recognizing its own state of lostness. The coin has no capacity for finding its way back to where it belongs. The coin is not capable of seeking; it must rely upon the woman with the silver coins who comes in search of the lost coin. She lights a lamp; she sweeps the entire house as she searches for her lost coin.

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Some people are like that lost coin: they are so lost that they don't even realize just how lost they really are. They have little choice but to wait for someone to seek them out, claim them and then bring them back home. I wonder if that describes any of you: you're lost and you may not even realize that you are indeed lost.

In the parable Jesus tells us that the woman finds her lost coin! And when she finds it she is so filled with joy that she throws a party. In fact, the value of the party that she throws may very well be more than the value of the coin! But it doesn't matter; she is filled with an extravagant delight in finding her coin.

On the other hand, the sheep is a different story. Sheep are notoriously dumb. However, they tend to run with the herd, and so presumably a sheep would be smart enough to at least know if it has become separated from the flock. If that were the case, then the sheep might begin to look for its flock and shepherd. More likely, though, it would become distracted by the sight of fresh grass and stop in the midst of its search in order to graze in a new field. Sheep tend to nibble their way into "lostness." Haven't you known people who nibble-nibble-nibble until they're lost? Have *you* ever nibbled-nibbled-nibbled away until you were lost?

In the parable, the lost sheep—somewhat like the lost coin—is incapable of seeking out the shepherd. Its only option is to wait for the shepherd to come searching for it. For his part, the shepherd is so concerned about the lost sheep that he leaves the ninety-nine and goes out into the wilderness in search of the missing sheep.

Some people are like that lost sheep: they know they're lost, but they have no clue as to how they're supposed to get back to where they belong. They have little choice but to wait for a good shepherd to seek them out, claim them and then bring them into the fold. I wonder if that describes any of you: you know you've lost your way and you just don't know how to get back to where you belong.

Like the woman with the coins, the shepherd finds his missing sheep. He rescues it and returns it to the fold. Then, like the woman with the coins, he throws a party to celebrate the recovery of his lost sheep. Like the woman who saved coins, he is filled with extravagant delight in finding his sheep.

The delight of the two seekers is an important element to these two parables as well as the one which follows. Jesus presented these parables after the Pharisees and scribes were "grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

There's a remarkable contrast between the reaction of the religious "hoity-toities" and the reactions of both the woman and the shepherd. The Pharisees were behaving as though the tax collectors and sinners were of no value—and, by extension, the coin and the sheep were of no value.

In contrast, the seekers saw great value in both the coin and the sheep. And in the process, the woman and the shepherd teach us something about God.

What is God like? According to these parables, God is someone who relentlessly seeks after those who are lost. **God is the Compassionate Seeker**, ever searching for the lost. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners not because they were more scintillating

conversationalists than the scribes and Pharisees; he ate with them because they were lost and he was relentlessly seeking after them.

What is God like? According to these parables, God is someone who sees value in every person—even those who have been written off by society as being worthless.

We've all known people who could be described as "worthless." Hopefully that descriptor only refers to that person's contribution—or lack of contribution—to society. However, in God's economy no person is worthless. In God's economy you are not worthless even though you might feel that way from time to time.

What is God like? According to these parables—and in the vernacular of today—God is a party animal! Incidentally, that's why last week was so much fun! It was Rally Day, but it was really a great big party.

Anyway, God is a party animal. Anytime and every time a sinner repents; anytime and every time a sinner sees the Light, God throws a party in heaven.

When you cracked open your dusty Bible late that night, God threw a party for you. When you sat alone in your car weeping and repenting, God threw a party for you. When you knelt at the rail on the day of your confirmation, God threw a party for you.

That doesn't mean these two parables are stories of repentance (neither the sheep nor the coin was capable of repentance); however, both parables are designed to teach us something about God. And contrary to those of us who imagine God as a stern taskmaster or a vindictive judge or a divine scorekeeper,<sup>1</sup> God is Someone who is easily moved to overabounding joy. God is Someone who loves nothing more than to throw a celestial party for you and invite all the angels of heaven to join in the festivities.

The prophet Zephaniah described God this way:

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty. He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy. He will rest in his love. He will joy over thee with singing (3:17, KJV).

We, in turn, respond to the extravagant love of God in the words of the psalmist:

You have turned my wailing into dancing; you have removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever (Psalm 30:11-12).

And then God invites all of us to join in the party, as Jeremiah declared:

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow (Jeremiah 31:13 NRSV).

But there's more: the coin collector and the shepherd are not only representative of God. The coin collector and the shepherd are just ordinary people, as ordinary as sliced bread. They also represent us and just as they sought after that which was lost they're telling us that

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cousar, *Texts for Preaching*, WJK 1994, pg. 515.

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we are to do the same. We are to follow their example. Like the woman who swept her home till she found her coin; like the shepherd who left the ninety-nine in order to find one lost sheep, we are to become seekers of the lost.

We have a mission. Our mission is to connect people to Jesus Christ. And I love that mission statement. But I kind of like the way our mission is presented in today's parables: our mission is to get the party started!

Let the people of God say, "Amen!"