

Lost and Found

Parables of Jesus: Part 10 “Lost and Found”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 24, 2021

22nd Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Luke 15:10-10

Reflection: Psalm 71:1-12

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 71

In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you. I have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all day long. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together. They say, "Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver." O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!
(*Psalm 71:1-12 NRSV**)

We read the words of Psalm 71 and hear of God's salvation and deliverance. That God is there to rescue us when we are lost. That we are to be an example to others and to praise God. How do you call out to God when you are in need? How do you set an example for others? Do you trust God to help you in your times of need? Do you show God's love to those who are lost? How can we share in the hope of Christ's redeeming grace?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to celebrate when hearts and lives are changed because of your great love. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus' name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 15 verses 1 through 10.

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives. "Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won't light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life." (Luke 15:1-10 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Now you might notice that for the parable for this week we stepped backwards from the last two weeks to cover the two parables just ahead of the Prodigal Son. And you might ask "Haven't we already covered the idea of lost and found? What more is there to say?" But this week I want to look at something different. The last two weeks we looked at ways we get lost, whether it be wandering away or being stuck in place, but this week we look at the joy being found and the joy we have when we find, because I don't think that the joy is just in heaven. It is about the rejoicing in heaven over one lost sinner saved, but it's also about our rejoicing over that salvation. Not just our own, but when others are found. Now, in an odd way, I could relate to the parables for this week because of my three-hole punch. Sometimes I refer to it as my interdimensional three-hole punch because it always seems to be in another dimension when I go to look for it. And every time I think I've put it in a place that I will most definitely find it the next time I need it, I don't. Now, a quirk you might not know about me is that I'm not fond of things being lost that I know can be found. And so, whenever I go to find that three-hole punch, I look everywhere. I look on top of the refrigerator. I look in my office equipment. I look in the

papers that I may have used it on before and put into storage. I check my desk. I check my printer. I check the bags that I transport everything in when I am going to class or going into the office. I turn the house upside down, and I look everywhere. And when I find it, there's relief. There's satisfaction. There's rejoicing because what was lost has been found.

Now, the reason I give you this story is that I rejoice over finding a three-hole punch, a simple tool needed only on occasion. How much more must the rejoicing be when someone changes their heart and life? Someone who is lost but is found? We get this picture in both of our parables for today. The familiar story of if someone had a lost sheep, they leave the ninety-nine to go in search for it. And when they find it, they call the friends together to rejoice. Or the woman who has ten silver coins and loses one. So, she goes on a hunt for the one. Now, there's a few things to note in this. One of them is that both parables mention that it isn't just that they only had one and it was lost. That's where they differ from my three-hole punch. I only have one three-hole punch. So, when it's not found, I can't say I'll use my other three-hole punch. And, knowing me, it would probably also be in a very safe and secure location that I can't remember. But it does say something about the message that we're being given. The message that we get is that it doesn't matter if we still have ninety-nine. The one that is lost and is found is still precious. It doesn't matter if we have ten silver coins, the one that is lost and is found is still worth something. It also tells us that it is right, and it is good to celebrate that which is found.

This comes into play when we start thinking about each other. Because the grumbling that starts this entire sequence is the tax collectors and sinners of all kinds are gathered around Jesus to listen to him teach. The Pharisees and the legal experts are put off by this. Why are they put off by it? Because these are the unworthy. These are the people that should be shunned. These are the people that have been judged as to not be righteous. They are the lost. Now, their condescension creates a paradox. And it's this paradox that Jesus addresses. They want to complain about these lost sinners coming to hear what Jesus has to say. That he eats with them and spends time with them. How can he be any better than them if he welcomes them in? But how do you reach those people if you're not willing to sit down and be with them? How do you offer them hope if you refuse to give them the time of day? How do you deliver a message of salvation without ever giving it to those who need to hear it? This is the conundrum. The Pharisees and the legal experts don't see these people as being worthy to sit down and eat with because they have to change in order to be worthy to sit down and eat with. But how can they ever feel that they are worthy of that change if they're never invited in? It would be like yelling, "Go live a better life!" and never showing them what that looks like.

So, the message that we get is that if you are going to help people, you have to interact with people. That those who are lost are worthy of being found. And that's the overall message that we get in our parables for today. We could sit and say "I have ninety-nine sheep. One's gone. I guess that one's gone." But what message does that send? If one sheep isn't worth finding, we lose one sheep, and then we lose one sheep, and then we lose one sheep. Again,

and again until there are no sheep. If you lose a coin and don't go to find it, you can keep losing those coins. You keep losing until there's nothing left. But the picture Jesus presents is another one entirely. Go and find the one that's lost and then celebrate the return. It's also about community. Find the one who is lost and make the community whole again. Bring them in, rejoice, and let them know how happy you are that they are found.

Because our parables for today also address another big issue we can run into. And that would be making excuses. As I thought of this idea of lost and found, I started thinking about how sometimes we make excuses for those that are lost. They're lost because they don't listen. They're lost because they don't want to be found. They know better. They keep making bad decisions. And we make excuses for why we don't need to go and look. Why we don't need to try to bring them back into the fold, so to speak instead of saying to ourselves, "See, this one is lost and needs to be found." We say, "See, that one's lost. Shame on them." The problem is that if we just shrug it off, we never take the time to understand why. Why someone could get lost. why somebody may have fallen. why someone has stumbled. And if we're not willing to find out why, we're not willing to show the love needed to make things better. In fact, we often compound the problem by turning a bad choice into a loss of community. Instead of thinking that it's our responsibility to find those who are lost and bring them in, to find those who have stumbled and fallen and need help up so that they can recover, we say "that's not on me, I'm still found." And we don't do the work necessary to show love, and we start to become lost because of our lack of care, and our lack of love, and our lack of mercy, and our lack of grace.

One of the lessons that we can learn from these parables is the importance of helping others and in showing joy over those who change. We can get caught in the trap of always rewarding the best behavior while never trying to reward those that are making an effort. That we look around and say "we are all here, we are all saved. This is my community." Where the reality is we need to be looking around asking "who's missing?" Asking "how can I bring them in so that they can be made whole, so that we can be made whole? Who isn't here that I need to check in on to make sure that they know that when they are missing that someone takes notice?" Because the joy is for all of us. That when one is redeemed, it is our joy. Because as we are in Christ and Christ is in us, when we help others to find that joy it becomes our joy. When we celebrate Christ and others finding hope and salvation in him, we celebrate it together. Because that's what a Christian community is. Not just a community of believers, but a community of hope for all. Not just a community that loves each other, but a community that loves all who could be a part of it. Not just a closed community in which those who are here are the ones who belong and those who are not don't matter. But a community that says we want all to be involved because we know that all people matter. And then we take the extra step of noting the individual matters. We note the hardships and the struggles. We see our own failings in the failings of others and can therefore sympathize. We recognize the hardships, and we have empathy for those who are struggling. And instead of passing judgment and condemning, we share hope and love. We extend mercy and grace. Because we are reminded of the mercy

and the grace and the love that have been extended to us in Christ. And we discover joy. Joy in each person who finds hope, who finds meaning. Each person who finds the love and the salvation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That with each who is lost, being found is a cause for all to celebrate. So let us make that celebration in our Lord and let us make the effort. We go into the world, not to judge it, but to give it hope. Not to shun it but to show it love. Not to exclude, but to include. That we may help others be whole in Christ and become whole ourselves as a community. When we celebrate in what was lost being found, when we celebrate those who have stumbled and help them back up, then we may live and love the joy that Christ has in each of us. And in all who are lost and found. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

October 31st – *Looking Down* – Luke 18:9-14

In which we find a parable about prayer, self-righteousness, and how we view others.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Family of Herbert "Tip" Carlen
Family of Andy Shull	Family of Brent Pitcher	Family of Allan Dunne	Family of Bill Hayden
Gene Laymon	Family of John Blade	Family of Emily Jobe	Family of John Kinzel
Family of Karen Robinson		Family of Charlie Henderson	

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