

## The Joy of Being Found

Luke 15:1-10

Today we will be looking at two similar parables: the lost sheep and the lost coin that speak of “The Joy of Being Found.”

Luke’s image of the shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine sheep and goes seeking the one lost sheep is based upon several Old Testament passages:

“As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among the scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Ezekiel 34:12).

“He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep” (Isaiah 40:11).

As we seek to understand this first parable we must keep in mind the context in which it is written. Luke had just noted that the tax collectors and sinners were coming to listen to Jesus. Also, Jesus had eaten with such people. Therefore, Luke used this parable to show that God’s love reaches out to even one tax collector or sinner who is away from the fold. Such is the amazing love of God that God is not content until all are safely in the fold. The Pharisees and scribes tended to put boundaries around people, certain ones were not included in their elect.

The Pharisees would not defile themselves by associating with the so-called “people of the land” who did not observe the law, many of whom could not read or write, but Jesus loved them and associated with them. Jesus identified with the shepherd image. In his day, the shepherd had a special responsibility for lost sheep. The shepherd was skilled in finding lost sheep, and if the worse happened to the lost sheep the shepherd had to bring home the fleece to show how the sheep had died.

We can imagine what the “people of the land” thought of Jesus’ words, if they understood him correctly, they didn’t have to earn God’s love. God was already coming looking for them and when they were found, a noisy celebration ensued.

The parables are quite similar in length, form, and content. No geographical reference is given. The Pharisees and scribes are critical of Jesus’ eating habits, namely eating with tax collectors and sinners. In verse 7:38 Jesus was described as “Behold a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”

These two parables are obviously twins, featuring a man and a woman. Both parables are not found in Matthew and Mark. The Pharisees’ concern was that Jesus was meeting with and even eating with, the wrong kind of people. The Pharisees were very strict in obeying the law of Moses, and they expected others to do the same.

Some scholars have been critical of the shepherd for leaving the ninety and nine sheep in the wilderness unprotected. The emphasis here is to accent God’s amazing love represented by the shepherd who diligently searches for the loss sheep at the risk of his own life.

In the second parable about the lost coin the woman also did not “give up” until she found it. Then when she found it, she was filled with joy. She must tell others. She had a party. Her joy must not be kept to herself, but she must share it with someone else.

The first parable is about a lost sheep. Jesus said: “Which one of you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?” (15:4).

What follows was a celebration. “When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And 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’” (15:6).

Jesus concluded by saying: “Just 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 (15:7).

The parable of the lost coin is similar.

Jesus said: “Or 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?” (15:8).

Once again, a celebration ends this story. “When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin I had lost’” (15:9).

Jesus concludes these two parables in a similar manner: “Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (15: 10).

Regarding the banquet itself, Tom Wright tells of an episode in his own life:

There can be no doubt why the two people in our two parables were celebrating. They had told all their friends and neighbors; they were so happy that what they thought was lost had now been found.

Who are the “lost” people of our generation? Where are they?

It is that older person who feels abandoned and lonely. It is that individual who has been in an abusive relationship and is seeking someone to love them. It is the young person who has been rejected because of their sexual orientation. It is the person who has lost everything and is seeking shelter and safety. It is the person who marginalized by society. It is the person who is hiding in fear because they sought a new life in a new land and are now criminalized for it.

Who are the lost, anyone who needs God’s love and acceptance. We are the shepherd and the woman in the parables who are to search for those who are lost. It will not take you long to find the lost in our world, they are all around us in plain sight. All we must do is recognize them and offer them God’s grace and love, like the shepherd and the women in the parables. We then can celebrate and give thanks for that which was lost, has been found. Amen.