

17 Pentecost Yr C, 11/09/2016  
Lk 15:1-10  
Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“God’s love for the lost”

How many of you have ever been lost before? I think most, if not all of us have been lost at one time or another. As you know there are different kinds of being lost. The most common type of being lost is likely an unfamiliar place, somewhere you’ve never been before.

I can remember years ago now, the first time we visited West Edmonton Mall. We made the mistake of not paying attention to which entrance we had used to go into the mall. Well, when it was time to leave the mall, we realized that we were lost. We just could not remember where we had entered the mall and where we had parked our car. It took a lot of searching before we finally recognized the place where we had entered the mall. Maybe that has happened to you too.

There is however another type of being lost. We can get lost spiritually too. We can wander far away from God and become lost spiritually. Perhaps some of you have been lost in this way too. Or most likely if you haven’t, you perhaps know of someone who has; or you’ve heard or read about many a story of folks who were spiritually lost and God searched them out, found them and welcomed them into his family. Stories such as Moses who murdered an Egyptian taskmaster and fled from Egypt; or King David who was guilty of both adultery and murder; or the apostle Paul who made every effort to persecute and put to death followers of Jesus. However, Moses, King David and the apostle Paul were not able to escape the love and grace of God who searched for them in their lost-ness, found them, and called them to accomplish his holy will and purposes.

Reverend Billy Graham tells of a time early in his ministry when he arrived in a small town to preach a sermon. Wanting to mail a letter, he asked a young boy where the post office was. When the boy had told him, Dr. Graham

thanked him and said, “If you’ll come to the Baptist church this evening, you can hear me telling everyone how to get to heaven.”

“I don’t think I’ll be there,” the boy said. “You don’t even know your way to the post office.”<sup>1</sup>

In today’s gospel Jesus tells two parables—one of a lost sheep, and the other of a lost coin. These two parables are only found in Luke’s Gospel. One reason why they are only found in Luke’s Gospel, I think; is because as a gospel writer, Luke seems to emphasize the theme of Jesus coming to seek and to save the lost. Luke seems to focus quite a lot on Jesus seeking and saving folks like the ones in today’s gospel, tax collectors and sinners. It is almost as if Jesus had a special magnet on him that attracted the outcasts of society—the tax collectors and sinners. For example, notice how Luke describes it here: “Now *all* the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.” The little word “all” suggests there could have been quite a large crowd of tax collectors and sinners listening to Jesus.

Jesus seems to have their undivided attention. So he goes on to tell them these two parables about a shepherd and a lost sheep, and a woman and a lost coin.

Both parables make the same point. The shepherd and the woman both represent the Lord who, like the shepherd and the woman does everything they can to find the lost sheep and the lost coin. So the emphasis is on God. God is like a loving, caring, faithful shepherd who searches after a lost sheep and refuses to give up until he has found it. God is like the woman in the parable; notice the verbs that are employed to describe the lengths she goes to find the lost coin. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds the lost coin. According to one commentator: “The floor [of a poor person’s house at that time] was beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes; and to look for a coin on a floor like that was very much like looking for a needle in a haystack.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, it took a lot of effort in order to find a lost coin in such a house. Yet in these parables we’re

told that both the shepherd and the woman keep seeking and searching until they've found what was lost. They placed such a high value on what was lost that they did everything they could in order to find what was lost.

God is like the shepherd and the woman; God highly values lost human beings—sinners and tax collectors. God highly values the lost, those whom others may regard as having little value. Others who despise and reject tax collectors and sinners; God searches for, finds, loves, and rejoices over.

In both of these parables, Jesus teaches us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways. For example, what shepherd would even think of leaving behind their 99 sheep to go and search after 1 lost sheep? The only reason a shepherd would do that I think is if there were other people looking after the 99 sheep; or the shepherd had placed those sheep in a safe place. Or what woman would spend the time and energy on looking for a small coin, a drachma, worth very little? The only reason such a woman would do that I think is if they were very poor.

In today's world many people sadly despise and even persecute other people who are different than they are because they do not have the same colour of skin as they do; or they were not born in the same country as they were; or they may be of a different faith than themselves. However, the people who are despised and persecuted and even killed by so many in the world today; are precious to God. God loves and treasures those whom far too many in the world today hate; and God will not stop searching for them until he finds them and joyfully welcomes them into his family.

So if and whenever you feel lost in your life, do not despair! Take heart! God loves and treasure you. He will search everywhere and will not stop until he has found you and joyfully welcomed you into his family. Amen.

1 Brian Cavanaugh, *The Sower's Seeds: One Hundred Inspiring Stories for Preaching, Teaching and Public Speaking* (New York & Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 54.

2 Wm. Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke* (Burlington, ON: G.R. Welch Co., Ltd., 1975), p. 202.