

We turn now to reading from the 15th chapter of Luke. The 15th chapter of Luke is a chapter of the Bible that could just as well be called the Lost and Found chapter. That is because Luke 15 contains 3 stories of items and people becoming lost and then becoming found.

We begin this chapter by paying attention to the people that the three stories are addressed to. Pay attention to the audience as we read Luke 15:1-2.

So we have a contrast set up between the outcasts and church outsiders on the one hand and the well-established and insiders on the other. We have tax collectors and sinners in one group and Pharisees and scribes in the other group. Tax collectors were looked down upon because to collect taxes meant that the tax collectors could also skim off the top for themselves. Tax collectors were seen as untrustworthy. So that is one group. Tax collectors and sinners. Folks considered to be on the outside.

The second group contains Pharisees and scribes. Pharisees were one of the 3 major Jewish sects and they were seen as the legalists. They believed in strict interpretation of Jewish law. Pharisees are never represented in a good light in the gospels. Scribes were the ones who transcribed the rules. So the Pharisees and scribes wielded a lot of power over what type of information was shared with the common people. Pharisees and scribes are always shown in a bad light in the Scriptures.

Now let's read the first of our three stories of lost and found.

Read Luke 15:3-7

The first of the lost stories that Jesus shares is the story of the shepherd who has 99 sheep and loses one of them. Shepherds were looked down upon by the elitist class of Pharisees and scribes. Being a shepherd was considered a low class job. But this person of low class is the one that Jesus uses to tell this story.

Which one of you if you have 100 sheep and you lose one of them would not keep searching and searching and searching until you find the one. The hearers know that this is actually not wise. Leaving the 99 is foolish because something could happen to the 99. But that is not what Jesus says in this parable.

Jesus says that God is the type of shepherd that will search and search and search for each lost sheep because each and every one of them is important to the shepherd. This shepherd does not play favorites. There are no perfect sheep. There are no sheep that are prized as more important than other sheep. Every sheep is important. The sheep that is lost is just as valuable as the sheep that always stay with the group.

And sheep do not run away like a dog. Sheep meander away. They find grass that is a little bit greener over away from the group. They get so focused on the green grass that they lose track of the rest of the group. Just like a person who gets distracted by the temptations around them.

They slowly give into those temptations and before they know it they have lost sight of their community and their family. These are the types of people that used to be active in a faith community but then they miss one or two Sundays for various reasons then the next Sunday becomes a little easier to stay away from church.

These are the types of people who find themselves more and more consumed by their work or their tablets and other devices and before they know it they have become completely disconnected from the people that used to be very important to them. But in this parable the lost sheep is eventually found because the lost sheep is very important to the lowly shepherd. The lost sheep is as important as the sheep that is never wanders away.

When the lost sheep is found there is great joy in heaven. A party is held to celebrate the finding of the one lost sheep. There is more joy in heaven over one sheep who repents and makes a change to be more in line with God's will than over the 99 who already get it.

Now we come to the next story of lost and found. **Read Luke 15:8-10**

This time the story is focused on the woman who suddenly loses a coin. She searches and searches until she finds that one lost coin. This is the person who quickly gets connected to destructive behavior. The teenager lost to the wrong crowd. The adult who can't cope with responsibility and separates themselves from others. But once again the responsible one searches and searches and searches until the one that is lost is found.

The third lost story is one which may be familiar to us. It is usually called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Sometimes it is called the parable of the forgiving Dad. It's a long story so instead of reading the story I am going to invite us to watch a modern interpretation of this story.

Show video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWUqk0ybISs>

In all three of these parables, the main point is about something being lost but then the responsible one searches and searches and searches until that one is found. The one who always searches is compared to God who searches and searches and searches and never gives up on us.

When I was doing a Google search on the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" I was struck by how many modern interpretations there are of this parable. There are some songs written about this parable. There are lots of short movies and skits that have been made about this parable.

This is a parable that really seems to connect with us. Why is that? Why is this parable about a son who separates from his father such an important story for us?

I wonder if it has to do with the reality that many of us feel that sense of feeling lost in our lives. Maybe we are the teenager that feels as though we are different in some way than the others in our school. Maybe we are the teenager or young adult who has to tell our parents something about ourselves and we are scared at what they will think about us. For instance, one of my daughter's friends at school just came out of the closet and told her Republican parents that she was voting democratic this election year.

Maybe you are the person who feels misunderstood or have made destructive decisions that make you feel as though you are the lost one. Maybe you are the one that has been told by someone important to you that you are not special or loved by them anymore. Maybe you are the one facing an important decision and you feel lost at what you are supposed to do.

Many of us know what it is like to be the lost sheep, coin, or child. But in the stories that we read from Luke it is the one who is lost that is found. If we are the one that feels lost or is lost, God is the one who searches and searches and searches for us until we are found.

God is the one who never gives up on us. God is the one who loves us as much as any other human being that God has made.

God always loves us. God never gives up on us even if we give up on ourselves.

In God's kingdom, God always searches and searches and searches until we are found.
AMEN.

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