

Today we are going to turn to the 15th chapter of Luke and read two parables that Jesus shares about something being lost. The images that are used in this parable may not seem to us to be that big of a deal. But to compare God to a shepherd who searches for a lost sheep and to a woman who searches for a lost coin was a very radical analogy.

Shepherds were considered part of the underclass. They were grungy and not considered trustworthy. Women, were of course, treated as second class citizens to men. But like so many stories that Jesus shares he flips conventional wisdom upside down and causes people to look at the world in a very different way.

Read Luke 15:1-10

Who are the lost today? I am going to invite us to listen to a story that was just shared this week. This is a story that came on the radio this week on NPR's Storycorps segment. Listen as Vaughn Allen tells the story of working at the ticket counter of American Airlines on September 11, 2001 and checking in two of the 5 hijackers on the plane that crashed into the Pentagon.

<https://storycorps.org/listen/vaughn-allex-and-denise-allex-160909/>

On a side note, many of us here today may not know that one of the people responsible for identifying the remains of the passengers on Flight 77 was our own Dianne Marsh. Talk about a lonely responsibility.

Vaughn Allen shared one story of what it is like to feel lost. He had this incredibly painful event in his life and he felt as though he was completely alone. No one could understand what he was going through. And the people closest to him shared their grief by shunning him. He felt all alone and lost.

The two parables that we read today that Jesus shares are all about something being lost. Jesus shares these parables because some religious leaders are grumbling about the kind of people that Jesus is choosing to hang out with. Maybe we've heard the phrase that you can tell a lot about a person by the types of people that they hang out with? What does it say about Jesus that he hangs out with sinners and eats with them?

After hearing the grumbling going on around him, Jesus shares these two parables. In the first parable, a shepherd with 100 sheep loses one of them. Jesus asks the crowd around him, "would you not leave the 99 and go after the one lost sheep?" We are never told their answer.

But in the world that Jesus describes this shepherd leaves the 99 and goes after the one lost sheep. The shepherd searches until he finds it and then he rejoices.

Jesus then shares another parable to drive home what he is trying to say. What woman if she loses a coin does not search and search and search until she finds it? And when she finds it she rejoices just like the shepherd who finds the lost sheep.

So who are we in these two stories that Jesus shares? Are we the religious leaders who are grumbling about the types of people that Jesus is hanging out with? Are we the person on Sunday morning who gets upset if we have a favorite pew and someone we don't know sits in OUR place?

Are we the person who is irritated when people you do not know are using OUR church facilities? Are we the person who feels uncomfortable when you see someone who is different than you and they have become involved in some way in YOUR church?

Remember that in this story that Jesus tells it is the religious leaders who grumble and complain because of the types of people that Jesus is welcoming close to him.

Do we identify with these stories that Jesus tells because we have people in our lives that we sense have become lost in some way? Maybe it is that friend who is making choices that we know are destructive to their life. Maybe it is that person who has lost the faith in God that they once had.

Maybe it is that teenager that is out there searching for their place in the world and their eyes travel from video screen to video screen. Some of us know all too well what it is like to have friends that are lost in some way. "The world never looks so big as when someone you love is lost."

Or maybe we are the one that is lost and we may or may not know it. Maybe we are the one that has great pain in our life and we feel as though no one understands what we are going through. Maybe we are the one that is searching for something with meaning and we can't seem to locate it. Maybe we are the one that has had your world shattered in some way and you don't know what to do now and you feel so very lost.

One thing is very clear in these two parables that Jesus tells. It is the one that is lost that is the one that receives the focus. It is not the 99 sheep or the 9 coins that receive the focus. It is the one. The one that is lost and on the outside in some way. And when the one that is lost is found there is a party that is thrown.

What does this parable teach us concerning how we relate to the friend or the family member or the teenager that is lost in some way? This parable is an affirmation that we stay in contact with that person and show them that we care. This parable is an affirmation that God is about the business of being most passionate about the outsider who is lost in some way. And if we want to be following what God is doing then we will be involved in staying connected to the lost as well.

What does this parable teach us who may be feeling lost in some way? We find here a story of a God who does not abandon us for the ones who seem to have it all together. This story affirms that God continues to search and search and search for those that are lost.

No matter how far we run or how distant we feel from God it does not matter. God is about the business of searching for the lost. God is about the business of inviting the lost to turn from their ways and seek to follow and trust God.

Today we gather around this communion table. Around this table all are welcome.

All are welcome to discover that here is a place where all are found. AMEN.

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-Percy, Jennifer, NY Times article, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/07/magazine/the-lost-ones.html?_r=1

-Given: September 11, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)