

## **Finding the Lost**

September 11, 2022

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> 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.’ <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> “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? <sup>9</sup> When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”



The two stories that we read in Luke 15 are about finding lost items. There is a great celebration that follows. Who do you know that is lost? What have you lost recently, faith

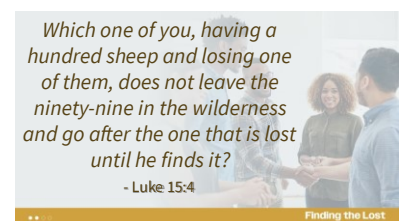
wise, that you wish to reclaim or find again? Would finding or reclaiming either be worthy of a celebration? As we prepare to consider the call to find the lost today, let us pray...

My family would come out to South Dakota most summers to visit my mom's side of the family. One summer we camped with several relatives at Horsethief Lake. One night a couple of us decided to go fishing. We brought a lantern with us and sat on this big rock overlooking a deep drop-off into the lake. Before we knew it, we were pulling in trout after trout. We barely had time to rebait our hook before pulling in the next fish. It was like they were begging to be hooked and landed. Before we could begin to think that we were just awesome fishermen, we realized that they were being drawn to the light. It was the light that attracted the fish to our bait.

In Jesus' day many were drawn to the light. But some did not like the light. It revealed much that they often did not want to see or acknowledge or admit. So they complained and grumbled about Jesus, the light. Jesus had been hearing this white noise for some time now. He was way too friendly with "those" kind of people. He spends way too much time in the company of "those" people. In today's passage, Jesus hears this complaint: *"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."* In response to these complaints and raised eyebrows, Jesus tells a few stories. This morning we will walk through the first two. You are invited to consider the third parable in GPS question #3 this week.



Jesus gathers the crowd and the complainers around him and tells a story. He begins by asking, *"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"*



We assume most hands went up. But in reality, that was probably not the case. Even though most there were probably not farmers or ranchers, those there knew what the right answer would be. No one would leave 99 to go and look for 1. It would be crazy to leave 99 sheep unprotected to go and look for one who had wandered off.



The second story is also about finding something that was lost. The second story is about a woman who loses a coin. It is a silver coin, so it was of value. It had worth. It wasn't like she lost a denarius, worth a day's wages. This woman lights the lamp and sweeps the house, looking in every crack and crevice and corner until she finds the lost coin. When she finds the coin, she throws a party for all of her friends and neighbors. She calls out, *"Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost."* This seems a little excessive, doesn't it? She might not have even come out ahead in the end. Maybe the party cost more than the coin was worth. Maybe she'd have been better off just to be happy with the nine coins.

It all seems so excessive, this party-throwing for something that was lost and was found. The coin rolled off the table and into a crevice or crack or some dark corner. The sheep followed its nose down some side gully and was separated from the flock. What makes them worth all the effort to find them? What calls for a celebration, for a big party? These were the questions that Jesus was asking the crowd, especially the complainers.

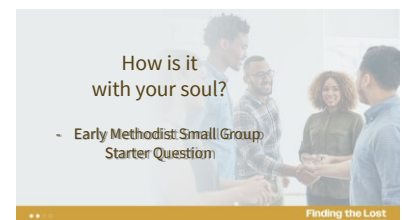
There was a lot of effort given in the seeking of the lost. The shepherd risks life and limb to find this wandering sheep. The shepherd puts the 99 at risk. The shepherd should know better. A pack of wolves or a bear would quickly claim a handful of sheep that were left unguarded in a hot minute. In a heartbeat the 99 could become 94 or 95. What then?! And the woman – she lights a lamp, burns the midnight oil, sweeping the whole house, putting in a careful search, giving extra effort to find this coin. And you know what, neither the coin nor the sheep asked to be found. This is perhaps like many people that we know.

We all know people who are uninterested in being “found,” in the spiritual sense. They feel like they have no need to be rescued or to be led into the light of Jesus. Life is just fine. Well, not good, but just fine. They are not breaking down the doors of the church; they are not yelling out loud so that we can find them. In fact, some are almost annoyed when we try and invite them to church or try and share our faith with them. Now, we like fishing when the fish are practically jumping out of the water, coming to the surface to dine on the bait that we dangle, trying to get closer to the light. We can do this kind of finding the lost. And even more so, we like the kind who find their own way back. These take little effort on our part. This is a faulty premise that we too often fall back on: the lost will find their own way back or they will ask to be found, somehow. But this is not good fishing or good evangelism – no fish jumps on the hook without at least a little effort on our part. Next to no one just wanders back into church. So Jesus suggests a different approach, a different understanding, a different relationship. Jesus invites us to actively seek the lost, to be the ones putting in the majority of the effort. That is why these stories are maybe hard for us to hear.

Jesus tells us that we have work to do, that there is effort to extend. But it is not the mundane task or the plodding effort that we are called to. No, Jesus invites us to seek with joy, to seek something that is precious, to expend great energy to find something that is of great worth. And he tells us to celebrate when those that we are seeking are found. Unlike the complainers who just grumbles more, we are to celebrate, to throw a party. We are not to judge and to point fingers and to condemn them until they decide to measure up to some standard that we set. We are not to say, you wandered off, you find your way back. We are to seek the lost.

Do you remember when you were lost? Do you remember what it was like to be found? Can you remember what it was like to be loved back into faith and into community?

Back in the day, back when John Wesley was leading this fledgling Methodist movement, everyone in the faith community gathered weekly in small groups called “bands.” As these small groups or bands gathered each week, they would begin with this simple question: How is it with your soul? In turn, each person in the circle would honestly answer this question. It was a soul-bearing exercise that often included both confession of sin and thanksgiving for how God was working in their lives. The answers were sincere and came from deep within the heart. I imagine there was often wringing of hands and shedding of tears. It was a time, though, that build strong connections between the members of each band. So let’s take a few minutes, turning to a friend or neighbor, taking turns answering this question... Just kidding. Did you hear the collective sigh?



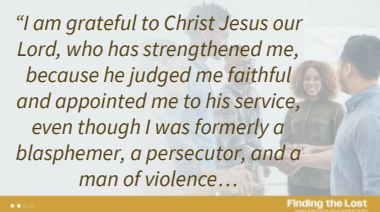
As Christians we like to keep our mistakes hidden. We tend to hide the unpolished parts of ourselves from one another. We are not unlike the world in this respect. No one likes to admit one's weaknesses and places of struggle or trial. Yet these stories are just what we are called to share, especially with the lost. When we share our struggles and our trials, it is then that the lost can begin to see how they too can be found. When we share the stories of what God has done for us, we are reflecting the deepness of God's love and mercy and grace. When we are honest with our answer to this question, it is then that we begin to find the lost and that they begin to see that they too could be found.



When we share our stories of faith, our stories of how we were saved, our stories of what God has done for us, then the lost begin to be drawn to the light. When we are honest about our lives and our faith, then we start to debunk the myth that church is just for perfect people who have it all figured out. Sharing the reality that we all are broken and in need of a Savior, in effect, tells the world that all people are welcome here. It tells them that all people are worthy and valued and loved – both by God and by us and by our church.

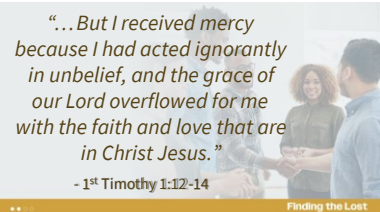
Let's look at one last question as we prepare to wrap up this time together. We touched on it earlier. Why is there a party for the one who is found? Why should we celebrate whenever someone who was lost is found? Why should we throw a party for those who are found? It's a simple answer. We live a celebration every single day. At least we should. Celebration should be our regular habit.

While we speak of the “lost” in the general sense as those who do not know Jesus as Lord, we are lost on a consistent basis. In fact, we are often lost in our sin, finding ourselves again and again in need of God’s redeeming grace. In our Epistle reading for this week we hear Paul's words as one who was lost and has been found. Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1 as we look at verses 12-17. In the first three verses we read, *“I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”* As Saul, he was the #1 enemy of the church. He violently persecuted the early Christians, arresting and murdering many. And yet God showed him mercy and extended Paul grace, filling Paul to overflowing with the faith and love that he found in and through Jesus Christ. Talk about a reason to throw a party!



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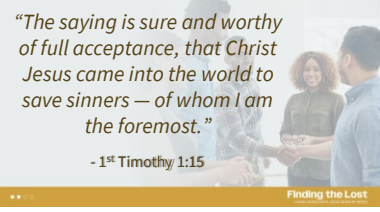


*“...But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*

- 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:12-14

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In response to being lost and found, Paul states, *“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the foremost.”*



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- 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:15

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This saying remains sure and true. Jesus came to save the lost, the sinners, the outcast. He came to save you and me. He came to save all people. And like Paul, all can be saved by grace. This, my friends, is why you and I are called to actively seek the lost, to go out and search for those who do not know the Savior, so that they too can come to know Jesus’ saving grace. May we strive to find the lost, sharing with them the one who saved us. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. In the Wesleyan spirit, reflect on this question: How is it with your soul?  
Then consider what you could do, starting this week, to better your answer.
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know that needs to experience saving grace? Spend some time in prayer considering how you could share your faith story with them.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 15:11-32. The younger son repents and comes home. What do you need to repent of in order to grow closer to Christ?