**Luke 15: The Parables of the Lost Things**

Sunday, January 2, 2022

`Roy Christian Church, (Originally preached March 9, 2008)

Jesus made a habit of gathering for meals, and the religious leaders, the experts and scholars did not approve. Eating with “unwashed” “tax collectors and sinners” was particularly offensive to the Pharisees, because in the Middle Eastern world, eating with someone symbolized friendship, intimacy, and unity. Meals were shared with social, religious, and economic equals. Violating this brought shame on oneself and family. Not only that, but Jewish priests had to maintain ritual purity, which kept them from eating with other Jews and certainly with Gentiles. The Pharisees chose to live in a state of priestly purity year-round, and they avoided table fellowship with those that did not live up to their standards. They regularly criticized Jesus for being with and eating with those “tax collectors and sinners.”

In Luke 15, Jesus teaches an important lesson about “those people.”

*1Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

***The Parable of the Lost Sheep***

*3Then Jesus told them this parable: 4"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

***The Parable of the Lost Coin***

*8"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

***The Parable of the Lost Son***

*11Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.*

*13"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*17"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20So he got up and went to his father.*

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*21"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

*22"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*

*25"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'*

*28"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

*31" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "*

Jesus tells these three stories to justify his practice of sitting with and eating with “undesirable sinners.” Whenever Jesus spent time with the “unwashed,” he was living out a parable, demonstrating that the kingdom of God was nothing like the elitist, judgmental standards and practices of people. Jesus practiced the radical inclusiveness of God.

These are also stories of joy and celebration. Jesus tells these stories to illustrate joy after desperation. All three follow a pattern: Something is lost, a search is made, and then there is a great celebration when it is restored. Let’s look at each story quickly:

**The sheep was lost and was found.** It wasn’t unusual to have a hundred sheep in a flock. Jesus says that if a shepherd counts at night before bedding down and comes up short, he goes to find the one that wandered away. The bulk of the flock will be fine right where they are. In a similar story in Matthew 18, Jesus talked about a sheep that wanders off. Ninety-nine sheep don’t wander away; one does. The finding of the lost sheep is overwhelming, and friends and neighbors are invited to celebrate. God is happy when a wandering one is found and brought home.

**The coin was lost and was found.** The woman had ten coins that amounted to about two weeks’ wages. As she counts, she can only find nine, and she begins to tear the place apart. Have you ever misplaced a two-week paycheck? There is a lot of activity until it appears again. She swept her dirt floors, and, I imagine, crawled over every square inch, looking for the glint of silver in the light of her oil lamp. When it’s found, she is overjoyed and invites the neighbors to celebrate her discovery.

**A son was lost and was found.** I get the idea that the father had been watching for this wandering son to return every day. Jesus indicates that he saw the son a long way off—that verb typically means to stare; he’s fixed on the horizon, just waiting. Maybe he had even sent search party? He saw the son coming home because he was looking for him. And when junior finally made his way home, how did the father react? There’s no disappointment or judgment. There aren’t crossed arms and “I told you that you’d come running home.” Nope. Dad “was filled with compassion.” It’s the same phrase used to describe Jesus’ reaction when He saw crowds of hurting, broken people in Matthew 14. It’s a visceral reaction, from the core. A joyful father runs to his son, welcomes and accepts him and celebrates this “resurrection” with a huge feast. Hallelujah! Wahoo! Yes!

All three stories have a sense of anxiety, urgency, and desperation. “I must find this sheep. I must find this coin. I must return to my father.” There is real value in these lost things, so much so that a party HAD to be thrown when they were found. **Jesus has focused on the joy of finding a lost thing. That’s a great point—the Pharisees needed to hear that—and He could stop there, but He doesn’t.** It feels like the real point and the punchline comes as He focuses on the “good son.”

The “good son” wouldn’t come to his brother’s welcome home party. He resented the value his father placed on his dumb, runaway brother. It’s possible the older son could have felt as though he had . . .

1) **NO value in his father’s eyes**. His years of faithful service and dedication meant nothing to his father. His prodigal brother still was more valued than he was. He was not going to celebrate the return of this brother. Or, more likely, he saw that he had . . .

2) **INFINITE value in his father’s eyes**. He was way more important than his lousy brother. He had remained faithful and obviously his father loved him more than the brother that had run away and played the fool. Why should he bother coming to a party to celebrate the return of this nobody? As he talks to his father, the older brother says, “This son of yours.” He doesn’t count him as a brother.

A loving father explains: “It was necessary to celebrate, and you should have been there. We couldn’t not have a party. Where were you? You could have been—you should have been—rejoicing with us!” He loves both of his sons! He remains loving to both the lost and the loyal.

Those people “have no value.” The Pharisees and teachers were offended and irritated by the company Jesus chose to keep. Jesus condemns the exclusivity of the “righteous” and their elitist attitude, “I’m okay, but you’re not and you never will be.” Jesus shows them through these stories that even the “tax collectors and sinners” have great value in God’s eyes.

**Whether the lost thing is 1 of 100, 1 of 10, 1 of 2, it’s still lost and precious. Is there any difference in the value to those who have lost them?**

Do you have any sense of urgency and desperation or, like the Pharisees, are you content with things as they are, irritated by the thought of expanding the borders of God’s kingdom? Are you reaching out? Are you accepting of others? Are you embracing those who are wandering and lost? Do you share in God’s sense of desperation for those who are outside the kingdom?

A man takes his wife and three children to the city waterpark on a roasting hot day. There must be 800 people in lines for slides, tubes, rafts, and more. Mom and the twin toddler girls are kicking their feet in the baby pool. Dad tells his son to stay close, and then they are off to play. An hour passes. The son needs a snack, and the man sends his son to go see Mom who has gone back to the picnic area. Several minutes later, Dad heads to the picnic area. Hey, where’s the boy? I thought he was with you. I sent him to find you. Oh no. I’ll go find him. The search begins with panic. What was he wearing? What color was his suit? Five minutes pass and a concerned father becomes a panicking, frantic father, bobbing, weaving. More minutes pass, and in desperation he begins bellowing his son’s name over and over and over again.

Do you share in God’s desperation to find His lost children?

Where does this touch you?

* There are those who don’t need finding/rescue. That’s good. That’s fine.
* Maybe you’re rejoicing over a lost one who repents, a lost boy has come home.
* Perhaps you need to extend real forgiveness to one who has turned around.
* You may need to embrace one who has gone away and has come back seeking restoration.
* Maybe you’re the lost one that is being sought by those who love you and especially by God.

In Matthew 18:14, Jesus closes with a powerful description of the Father’s love: *“In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”*