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Have you ever lost something important?

I'm not talking about a coupon for a free drink at a fast-food restaurant or something else of little consequence. I'm talking about something of real value.

I misplaced my wallet one time. I usually have a specific place for it when I get home each day, but on occasion I'll place it in one alternative spot. So when I looked in the first place and didn't see it, I didn't panic. I just walked downstairs and looked in that alternate spot.

When the wallet wasn't there, I remembered the last place I had it and walked to another room. When it wasn't there, I think I panicked a little.

I went back to multiple locations throughout the house, sometimes places I had already checked. My heart rate rose. I grew anxious. I just had to find that wallet!

I started thinking about all that had to be done: calling the bank and credit card company to have them cancel the cards, contact work to get new insurance cards.

Oh yeah, and then there was the driver's license. On top of everything else, I would have to wait in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles!

It was agony.

Then — and I'm not sure exactly how — my memory snapped into place. I had worn shorts to go buy ice cream for my wife and me the night before. I didn't have pockets, so when I got back in my vehicle with the ice cream, I put my wallet in the console so it would be safe.

So safe, it turned out, that I couldn't remember for 15 minutes or more that I had placed it there.

All that stress looking for a wallet. But, boy, was I happy when I found it.

Lost things — people, really — is the focus of this episode. We're spending some time between Christmas and Lent exploring the teachings of Jesus, specifically the lessons he taught using parables. Those are stories used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

Today, we're going to look at two of those parables. One involves a lost sheep — another a lost coin.

Together, Jesus uses them to teach people in his day and us today that our Savior never stops searching for the lost among us — people who think there is no hope, no purpose, who feel unworthy of love. And he teaches us that the lost being found is cause for celebration.

Let's get started.

In this lesson, we'll be studying the 15th chapter of the book of Luke. This gospel — or good news — appears in what we consider to be the third book of the New Testament. If you want to follow along, consult the index in the front of a Bible, or you can find it by starting about two-thirds of the way back from the very front of your Bible. If you prefer to read on an app, I recommend either YouVersion or BibleGateway. Both are available in the Apple App store or on Google Play as free downloads.

Let's start with what is known as the "Parable of the Lost Sheep." It's in Luke chapter 15, verses 1 through 7. I'll be reading from the Common English Bible.

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. ²The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"Suppose someone among you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the other ninety-nine in the pasture and search for the lost one until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he is thrilled and places it on his shoulders. ⁶When he arrives home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost sheep.' ⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives.

Sheep are powerful symbols in Christian circles. Sheep were critical to people in Biblical times. They provided nourishment as food. They provided clothing as their skins were put to use. And in the life of following the living God, they were used as sacrificial animals. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, we learn in chapter 5 that priests are to offer burnt offerings to make atonement for the people. In effect, the spilling of the animal's blood takes the place of the punishment humankind deserves because of our sin.

Sheep, for all intents and purposes, were important currency. They had real value then, just as they do today.

In this parable, Jesus talks about a herd of 100 sheep, and one of those sheep wanders away. Like us, the wandering sheep in this story has gone astray. It has left the safety of others. It apparently has become rebellious or has allowed itself to become distracted.

We do that sometimes, don't we? Some may struggle with this far more so than others. I'm not going to list a bunch of sins because I don't want to give an impression that some are worse than others. Besides, I have my own list to tend to, and you know what struggles you face.

The shepherd leaves the 99 in the pasture — the idea being safety in numbers — and tries to find the lost sheep. It's a beautiful metaphor for how Jesus pursues us.

We may do something sinful, and we may think that makes us unlovable, either to other people or to God. But I'm here to tell you that's simply not true.

If you are that lost sheep, you need to know that Jesus is looking for you. In fact, you're so important to him that he is willing to leave the rest of the flock — the people who already proclaim him as their Savior — to go in search of you.

How does that work, you may ask? You may wonder if you should be looking over your shoulder for someone searching for you. The reality is Jesus searches for you by providing opportunities for you to get to know him.

That might mean giving you a gentle nudge to enter into a church building some Sunday morning. You can find United Methodist churches in Kansas and Nebraska at <https://www.greatplainsumc.org/churches>.

But Jesus may reach out to you in other ways. Maybe it's the kindness of a stranger. It might be through drawing you to listen to this podcast. Maybe it's a book that you read, a song that you hear. It could be a prayer that comes to mind — and no, it doesn't have to be perfect and polished to be a prayer to God.

Those are just a few ways God reaches out to you through Jesus Christ.

If you have any doubt or questions, don't hesitate to email me at tseifert@greatplainsumc.org. And I'll do what I can to reach out and help.

I hope the lessons in this parable are clear. You are always loved by God. Jesus will never stop looking for you. You are heavily valued by your Savior.

We'll pause here. But I want you to remember that part about you being heavily valued by God, because we're going to get more into that right after this short break.

Welcome back to In Layman's Terms, a podcast about discipleship and following Christ. In this episode, we're talking about the parables of lost things. First, we talked about sheep. Remember, I asked you to keep in mind that you are of great value to God? That concept leads us to a second parable, this one about a lost coin. So let's go back to the Bible, this time still in Luke chapter 15, but in verse 8 to 10. Jesus picks up right where our story about the sheep left off.

⁸“Or what woman, if she owns ten silver coins and loses one of them, won't light a lamp and sweep the house, searching her home carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me because I've found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life.”

This brief story shares something that most of us can identify with. A woman has lost money. For us it may be a \$20 bill, or we misplaced the password to our retirement account website. Anybody out there ever lost the keys to their vehicle?

In this story, a woman has 10 silver coins and can't find one of them. You guessed it, if you feel lost, then you are that coin.

The woman searches her home carefully. I can see her looking under furniture, sweeping the floor with a broom to make sure she scoops it out from under a bed or a table. I can see her on her hands and knees, scouring, her home until she finds it.

Just like Jesus left the 99 sheep to search for you, he is willing to tear apart a room, furniture, accessories, carpet and all to find you — one of those silver coins.

See, I told you that you had value to God.

But I glossed over one part of the first parable about the sheep that I want to make sure you understand with this story about the coin: After the lost person is found, there is great rejoicing. It's cause for all-out celebration!

In verse 7, the tail end of that sheep story, Jesus tells us that "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes both heart and life than over 99 righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives."

In other words, when those lost to sin are found, and when they change by choosing to follow Jesus, there is cause for celebration.

In this second parable, the woman, after finding the lost coin, calls together her friends and neighbors to tell the story and to ask them to celebrate with her.

This is a huge relief to her. And just like in the first parable, Jesus says that "joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life."

The purpose of these two stories is pretty clear: You are loved. You are valued. You are desired. Jesus wants to find you.

Do you feel lost? Do you have sin controlling your life? Then now is the time to be like that sheep and pop out from behind the thick brush. Now is the time to be like that coin, swept out from a dark space and into the light so you can be seen. Now is the time to be found.

May I pray with you? Just repeat after me ...

Gracious and loving God, I know that I am a sinner. I am lost. Somehow, I've let sin take over my life and have not allowed you to draw me back toward you. I surrender those desires. I ask for your help in overcoming them, and I ask that you enter my heart and soul. I am here, Lord. You have found me. Now, please help me to be fully yours. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

If you just said that prayer, then I want to congratulate you in becoming a new creation in Christ. Would you please send me an email to let me know! I would like to, as the parables teach us, celebrate with you. My email address is tseifert@greatplainsumc.org.

I hope these parables help you better understand that you are loved, that you are valued, and that Jesus never stops looking for you.

We'll explore more of Jesus' parables in the weeks ahead.

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