



## THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

LUKE 15: 1-10

**"CARING FOR ALL OF THE FLOCK"**

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

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I 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.

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

- Where was Solomon's Temple located?
- On the side of his head.
- Where is the first tennis match mentioned in the bible?
- When Joseph served on Pharaoh's court.
- What did Adam say on the day before Christmas?
- It's Christmas, eve.
- Why didn't Noah go fishing?
- He only had two worms.
- Why didn't they play cards on the Ark?
- Because Noah was standing on the deck.
- Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible?
- Samson. He brought the house down.
- I clearly am not!

- I don't know how you think about Scripture, but despite these so-called Bible jokes, we often use words like holy or sacred to describe Scripture.
- You heard me read this sentence of Sacred Scripture, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." But the literal Biblical Greek says "This 'blankety-blank' welcomes the scum of society." The verse does not say "this man." Fill in whatever word I can't say from the pulpit that works for you. "This 'blankety-blank' welcomes the dregs of society." The Greek is meant to convey the religious leaders' absolute disgust and condemnation for Jesus eating with the wrong people.
- Jesus' home was likely in Capernaum into which he invited the white trash. These were the common people, in Greek, "the people of the land."
- His critics were the elite of the elite, the Country Club set. And, if you were a member of the elite, you would not eat with or entertain in your home any of the common folk.
- Think of the people who are on the society page of the Post-Gazette. You're not going to find anyone from Homewood or North Side at their parties. And if one of them did do something so outrageous, he or she would likely be shunned by the upper crust from that day forward.
- Jesus did entertain the lowest of the low in his home and, in reply to the complaints about what he was doing, he told the elite the two parables that I just read to you.
- Jesus makes it clear through these two parables that the reasons why the elite despise him are the very reasons why he has come into the world. What the elite consider shameful behavior is for Jesus a great honor.
- "What you do to the least of these, you do to me," Jesus Christ will later say....
- In spiritual stories like the first parable, one hundred sheep, a multiple of ten, is a perfect number. One hundred is complete, whole, representing all that is needed. So, the number ninety-nine is much more than just one less than one hundred. Wholeness, completeness, perfection is destroyed when one is missing.
- These one hundred sheep are our flock, Jesus tells the Country Club set. And the sinners, the common folk, the down-and-outers are part of the flock. They also are part of the wholeness. The loss of even one is significant.

- “And the lost sheep I am bringing home are sheep that you yourselves lost!” Jesus tells them. “I know you don’t like them and you despise me for going after them. But when they are lost, you lose because they are part of your flock. When they are found, it is your gain. Can’t you see this?”
- Jesus goes even farther in slamming the Country Club set.
- The profession of herding sheep was one of the “despised trades.” He deliberately uses a profession that offends them.
- And he uses a story about a woman who loses a coin. Women were considered inferior to men, so again Jesus is sticking it to them, surrounding the rich and religious with images of those they consider worth-less: shepherds, women, sinners, the people of the land, the lost.
- From the perspective of Jesus, the Good Shepherd watches out for all of the flock. A flock that is incomplete if even one, others considers worthless, is lost....
- In real life in the Middle East, no responsible shepherd would leave the ninety-nine to go look for one. He would assign an assistant to watch over the flock while he heads out in the wilderness.
- A shepherd who herded sheep for years in the hills of southeastern Turkey around the year 1900 recorded this event of losing a goat:
  - I called over to my cousin, the Village shepherd across the valley and reported my loss. He was too exhausted to help, but reported he had seen her over at the foot of the Quincy mountains. So, my brother and I sought for our goat. For four hours we walked in the moonlight over rocks and through thick thorny bushes. We covered every part of the mountain, climbing and then descending again. We imitated the goat’s bleat.
  - At last, weary and bleeding from thorns and sharp stones, we gave up hope of finding her. Just then we seemed to hear a faint response in answer to our call. We repeated the call. The answer came again clearer and stronger.
  - Exhausted and perspiring, we kept moving on in the midnight stillness towards the direction of the answer to our calls. To our unspeakable delight we found our blue goat curled against a mossy rock, bathing the latest arrival of her family. I took the pretty kid in my arms and put her close to my heart. My brother led the mother goat by the head as we made our way through the thickets to the path to

continue homeward. **We found our own souls restored as we brought our wandering pet to a place of safety.**

- This story points to a major reason that the elite and, perhaps we, turn our back on the lost.
- It is hard, exhausting, emotionally draining, and difficult work.
- That's likely why most people find excuses not to do this work. The elite in Jesus' day are like the elite in every day. They are a million judgments to throw at the down and out.
- "They're lazy. They're milking the system. They don't belong here. They don't help themselves. They keep messing up. I did it myself, why can't they? The Bible says God helps those who help themselves (even though it doesn't). It's just too hard to help people. I have enough troubles of my own."
- But God blessed our Congregational Council and staff, who in retreat this past January chose as our number two goal for CLC: **A genuine heart for the lost and the desire to embrace the mess.** Growing churches aren't just conscious of the lost, they pursue them and are ready to take on the messes of life they may bring....
- Isn't it a paradox that growing churches reach out for and care for the lost?
- It must give us life to help those who have lost their way....
- In order to pursue ordained ministry, we all have to take a battery of psychological tests (Steve knows what I'm talking about).
- I had started Seminary during the middle of the year, so I was late in taking the tests. After doing so, I went in for the evaluation and feedback session with the psychologist.
- He looked at my results, looked at me and said, "Is there anything going on in your life recently?"
- Obviously, there was something amiss in the results.
- I replied, "My mother was murdered two months ago."

- He closed his eyes, nodded his head in empathy and said, "That explains it. Let's not worry about the results."
- At that time, I was one of the lost and I was a mess, but the church in its compassion, understood and continued to reach out and care for me. I was not excluded from the flock for being lost or a mess....
- The untransformed heart and mind divides the world into two camps: the lost and found, the right and wrong people, those who have it together and those who don't, those we accept and those we don't.
- The untransformed heart and soul shut down in the face of anyone who brings a mess to the table.
- The untransformed spirit cannot see we are all one human flock....
- Today (tomorrow), we focus on our children. We have invested a great deal in caring for our children's spiritual and emotional lives.
- We have invested financially in a new, up-to-date contemporary curriculum. My wife has come back on staff to help with the transition. We have a CLC Kids team overseeing the process. Sixteen teachers have formed teams to work towards the best that we can offer. Lennie Jansen and Eric Stennett do a great job with our middle school youth. Jade Lane has taken the lead in providing opportunities for our high school youth.
- I don't think any of us would hope for less....
- But, our children face a world in chaos. Never in my forty years of ordained ministry, have I had parents speak of the fear they feel for their children like I hear today.
- When I was in junior high, what was my worst fear? That Judy Portman would no longer like me as her boyfriend? That I wouldn't make jazz band? That my parents wouldn't let me grow my hair long?
- What about today? Children fear bullying, social media harassment, will someone bring a gun to school, will a trusted adult try to molest me? Children today deal with depression, anxiety, unstable home situations, drugs, and poverty to an unprecedented degree.

- It is both sad and hopeful that some of the first to call for appointments at our Millvale Community Counseling Center are parents for their children.
- The purpose of the second parable is to point out that a coin, whether lost or found has value in and of itself. The value cannot be changed. **Neither can the value of a human being.**
- But, of course, many of our children are taught that they have no value. Many children are treated as if they have no value.
- Above the door to the sanctuary, it reads "Dignity and respect to all."
- The elite, religious and otherwise, of Jesus' day had respect for **the chosen few**. Is there one child lost out of the one hundred? To hell with him or her.
- And then along comes Jesus, **The Chosen One**, who says bring that child to me, go out and search for the lost one, come on into my house and let me fix you a meal. The flock is destroyed unless all are cared for. The one who is lost is as valuable as the ninety-nine I have in hand.
- Tim Wach suggested that the sermon song this weekend be "Children, Don't Stop Dancing." In Jesus' day, dancing arose spontaneously among the people as an expression of joy. So we invite parents and children to dance in the side aisles or up front during "Children, Don't Stop Dancing."