



Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



Sunday 11 September 2022

READINGS

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28; Psalm 14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Lost and Found

Our gospel reading for today is found in the famous chapter of St Luke which contains perhaps the most famous parable in the entire Bible – that of the Prodigal Son. But it also contains two other parables which illustrate the joy of finding that which is lost, and it also illustrates Christ loving searching concern for the single, human soul.

It is interesting to note that the parables of the “Lost sheep and the lost coin share a similar structure and plotline. Both parables have:

- (1) and object that is lost;
- (2) There is the search to find the lost object;
- (3) There is the recovery;
- (4) and lastly there is Joy when the lost is found.

In the first parable – a shepherd with a flock of 100 sheep discovers that one of his sheep is missing. He could have said upon learning that one was missing: “Well that is the way it goes in this business. You are bound to lose one or have one stray away once in a while. In the business world – a certain amount of loss is expected to occur. If the shepherd was lazy or tired – that is what he could have said and let it go at that. In the second parable – the housewife could have expressed similar views upon losing one of her ten coins of silver. She could have said – I still have nine left – why bother to look for it when I am already time out. Why not just forget about it.

THE SEARCH

But neither the shepherd nor the housewife in our gospel passage was so easily discouraged. Leaving the ninety-nine sheep secure in a sheepfold – the shepherd wasted no time in beginning to search for the lost sheep. He scoured the countryside to bring back a sheep that was lost. Patiently and persistently – the shepherd looked in everywhere imaginable spot to find it.

So too the woman who lost one of her ten coins searched carefully to find it. In spite of the darkness and the added difficulty it posed for searching – she lit a candle and searched in every corner of the house with her broom in an attempt to uncover her lost coin.

THE RECOVERY

Then we read in both parables – the diligence of both searchers is rewarded. After a long and tiring search – the shepherd finds the sheep at last – far from home. Probably in a very isolated and lonely spot

but nevertheless safe and sound and unharmed. Tenderly the shepherd takes it up in his arms – he places the sheep on his shoulders and carries it back home – to his main flock. The search of the woman was likewise not in vain. After much sweeping and searching – she suddenly noticed a shiny object in a far off corner of the house and sure enough there was the lost coin – she had been looking for.

THE JOY

Just as Jesus was glad to welcome and eat with tax collectors and sinners. The shepherd and the woman both celebrate at achieving the ends of their search and rescue missions.

The joy of these two people was so great that they wanted to share it with others. They both call their friends and neighbours together and say: “Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost – I found the coin which I had lost.

APPLICATION.

What is there for us to learn? Now both these seekers represent God or Jesus – in their search for the lost people everywhere.

When Jesus told these parables, two very different groups were listening in. One group included the despised tax collectors and other so-called undesirables. And the second group was made up of very religious people - the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Anyone familiar with the New Testament knows that Jesus and the religious leaders never saw eye to eye. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, Jesus spent far too much of his time with the wrong kind of people. The Pharisees saw them as people who are lost in a world of sin from which there is no escape. But these were the people who have come to listen to Jesus; they are on the road to repentance, which is a possibility completely lost on the grumbling Pharisees. They didn't realise they too were lost.

The great Shepherd – whose love will never let us go – who loves us with an everlasting love – sought and found us - which is one reason we are here today. You and I meant so much to God – sinners though we are – that He sent His son into the world to seek and save us. Jesus' willingness to associate with low status people turned out to have a long-term positive impact.

Throughout his earthly ministry – Jesus was constantly seeking people – one by one – when He sat at the well and talked with the woman of Samaria – when He befriended the woman caught in adultery and said, “Go and sin no more”. When he asked Matthew to follow him from his tax collector's booth – when he called Zacchaeus down from the sycamore tree.

Many Christians automatically identifies with the 99 sheep or the 9 coins. But the point of the story is to recognise that we are all the lost who need to be found. Even if we have been obedient sheep, we too were at one point found by God. The word of God reached our ear, or the sacrament of baptism lit the light of faith in our hearts and made us children of God and heirs of heaven. Through those means of grace – Christ found us and brought us back to Himself – just as the shepherd and the woman in the parables we heard this morning.

However, the story is not about us or any call to live better lives. The message is about God . God will go through any lengths to find what is His. The lost sheep cannot “unlost” itself, just like the lost coin cannot find itself. For both to be found, effort must be exerted by another. God, out of great love for us, commits to the restoration of the lost.

The message is about God and the fact that he will become exhausted, go to any lengths to find what is his and has been lost. God is not going to give up, God is relentless and will leave no stone unturned looking for that which has gone astray.

The fact that Jesus would share his life with all types of people gives us hope because we are told in the Epistle, "He (Jesus) came into the world to save sinners." Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, takes delight in the ninety-nine righteous people and gives them the reassurance of God's love, but he is also willing and able to search for the lost soul.

And speaking of being lost and sinful, the Apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy says that "even though he was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insulter of Jesus (because he acted in ignorance) and foremost of all sinners, he has been forgiven and called into ministry." He was lost but was definitely found. Jesus tells us that the angels of God rejoice when even one person who is lost is found.

May that celebration in heaven be kept powerfully as God continues to seek and save the lost.