

## 091122 "The Lost" Luke 15:1-10

Have you ever lost something that was really important in your life?

I read the story of a former New York Times employee who received his lost wallet, found some 40 years later. Inside, he found photos and documents from his past. What have you ever lost of real sentimental or monetary value? Did you get it back? Have you ever found something that seemed valuable and tried to return it to someone?

In Luke 15, there are three stories of finding what was lost: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son. In particular, in today's text Jesus tells the parable of a shepherd who seeks out one lost sheep and a woman who searches her home for a missing coin.

The first is the story of a shepherd who wanders through the mountains in search of one lost sheep, leaving the ninety-nine sheep behind. It's a story that expresses the supreme love of God who never gives up on even a single sinner. It is a very happy story from the point of view of that one lost sheep. Of course, how anxious and difficult would it have been for a sheep to get lost along the way? But in the end, the stray sheep was a happy sheep.

But let's switch positions and imagine that if you were not a single lost sheep, you were one of a flock of ninety-nine that were not lost. They followed their master, the shepherd, and there was temptation to go another way, but they persevered and moved only as the shepherd led them. But the shepherd leaves them in the field and searches for the lost sheep. If you were one of ninety-nine, how do you see this story?

The story that follows this parable tells a woman who has lost one of the ten drachmas or coins and rejoices when she searches the house and eventually finds the coin. Then comes the famous parable of the prodigal son. Through these stories, Jesus, of course, is saying that human life is more precious than the world, but we need to know who he was telling this story to. To whom Jesus told this story is clearly written in the Bible. If you read Luke 15:1-2, Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees and the scribes. Who were the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus' day? They were zealous followers of Jewish teachings.

In the first century, Jewish society was a society in which two strata, called "sinners" and "righteous people," were in conflict. The "sinners" included those who were a mixed heritage of a Gentile, had a lawfully filthy disease, the drunken, a Roman cooperating folklore, such as a tax collector, or a moral flaw. On the other hands, those who were purely Jewish, physically unimpaired, and who literally kept the law were among the "righteous" and "those who had the law of God."

The self-proclaimed righteous people saw that the token of righteousness was gained by not approaching the sinners. Therefore, they thought it was filthy to be with the sinners and tabooed them to be with them. They draw a clear line between sinners and righteousness, not only for their cleansing but also for the integrity of Jewish society because they thought that the order of God's people would only be maintained by drawing a clear line between the sinners and the righteous so that there would be no mixing of good and evil.

But Jesus is someone who searches until He finds the lost sheep even in heaven, like a woman who searches her whole house to look for her lost coin. The heaven is full of joy when one sinner repents and turns away from sin rather than 99 righteous people. What does this mean? This is a tremendous shock to the self-proclaimed righteous people who despise and deny sinners at the time of Jesus.

God does not despise or deny, but God is patient and awaiting their return to God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus is scolding the Pharisees and scribes for denying sinners in the name of God when God still looks for them. There are lessons to be learned here. Holiness pursued by discriminating against others quickly reveals its limits. So what should we do? We need to pursue holiness by sharing in the joy of God.

We can get used to the church life over time. But our relationship with Jesus should be better day by day. How can you do that? There is an answer in today's text. You can join in on the shepherd's joy. Practically, if someone has been away from church life because of Corona in the past 3 years, it is to give a word of encouragement. Maybe, it is to pray for their soul in love. When someone is trying to live a faithful life, rather than criticizing them for sticking out too much, it is to

find out what you can do to support them. When someone is living a successful life, it is to not be envious but cheering them on.

According to scientists, about half of our happiness levels are based on our genes. That means some people tend to be happier and more optimistic than others. But that doesn't mean you can't increase your level of happiness if it does not come naturally. In fact, research shows that 40% of people's happiness comes from the choices they make. So, what are the right choices for happiness? You may find inspiration from the participants in the Harvard Study of Adult Development — one of the longest-running studies on happiness.

The project has followed 724 men including 268 Harvard sophomores since they were teenagers in 1938 during the Great Depression. The group consisted of men from various economic and social backgrounds, from Boston's poorest neighborhoods to Harvard undergrads. President John F. Kennedy was even part of the original group. Over the years, the researchers have collected all kinds of health information, and every two years they ask members questions about their lives and their mental and emotional wellness. They even interview family members.

The Harvard Study has found a strong association between happiness and close relationships like spouses, family, friends, and social circles. The Key was not money or fame, but relationships. The project's director, Dr. Robert Waldinger says, "Personal connection creates mental and emotional stimulation, which are automatic mood boosters, while isolation is a mood buster." This Harvard study, 84 years old, has proved that embracing community helps us live longer, and be happier.

Next Sunday is Rally Day. I was asked by several people about the meaning of Rally Day. In some churches, Rally Day marks the beginning of the church calendar year. It typically occurs in September or early October.

Webster's Dictionary defines "rally" as a verb "to draw or call together for a common purpose" or a noun meaning "a renewal of energy in joint action". Rally Day is a day set aside to reassemble or "rally" after the relatively quiet summer of vacations. Come the end of summer, we need "a renewal of energy" when it comes

to spiritual matters. The Adult Bible study begins the fall term with a new selection of classes and topics. We also welcome new members into the church.

Sometimes, it's hard to renew your energy on your own. But it's much easier in a group. That's why we set aside one special day at the end of the summer to "rally" - to "draw together for a common purpose" seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to renew our energy for worship, for studying God's Word, for praying, and for making and nurturing disciples of Jesus Christ for such a time as this.

Is there someone from whom you are estranged, a distant friend or family member, or a person from our church you haven't seen in a while? If appropriate, find a way to contact that person and let them know you have missed them. It is time to rally. It is time to draw together for a common purpose again.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, stay connected and have others connected as well. You will surely find more happiness in the process. What's more, God will be even more pleased if you or someone else's lost life is found in the grace of God. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.