

It's Kinda Like This

Week 5: Lost and Found

Luke 15

It's so good to be back after a few weeks away. I really appreciate Ben and Tim and Tom preaching while I was out. I got to spend a couple of weeks in Israel. It's a trip I was supposed to go on back in March of 2020, but it got COVID'd. Three years later, I was able to go and I'm so glad I did. It was an incredible experience.

If you're interested in going sometime, we've got a trip planned for next March, 2024. You can get more info on it at socc.org/bulletin.

As amazing as the trip was, and it really was, it's always good to be back home, isn't it? During my time in Israel, there were reminders all around me that this wasn't home, from the food I ate to the bed I *tried* to sleep on, to the signs I couldn't read, language I couldn't understand, all the unfamiliar noises. *I'm sure I'm really selling you on the trip now!*

And everyone I met, Israelis and Palestinians, were incredibly friendly and kind, but I couldn't help but feel a little bit like an outsider. And that's such an awful feeling, isn't it? To be in a place where you feel like you don't belong. In a place where you feel like you just don't quite fit in. We've probably all been there at one point or another in life. Maybe you're there right now as you sit here in church. You're thinking, "This isn't a place I belong." You do...and I'm glad you're here.

It's bad enough when we feel like we don't belong somewhere, but there are times when people go out of their way to *make us* feel like we don't belong. Like we're not welcome. And, if you've ever been in that place, especially if it was at a Church, or by religious people, then our text today is for you. Today, we're going to look at a few stories Jesus told to people who felt like they didn't belong and to those who were making them feel that way. So, if you have a Bible, or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Luke 15.

We're wrapping up our series on parables today, these stories Jesus tells to help us see God more clearly for who He is and what He's like. What it means to live for Him and bring His Kingdom closer to earth.

And, in Luke 15, we find three of Jesus' most iconic stories. This chapter has been referred to as the "Gospel of the Outcast." I like that. This is a chapter of good news for those of us who have felt like we were lost. Like we don't belong. It's a chapter of good news for those of us looking for hope or for those of us who feel like we're wandering in life.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells us three stories about things that were lost. Probably the most famous of the three is the story about the lost, or prodigal, son. The son runs off with his share of his father's inheritance and squanders it all on wild living. When he comes to his senses and decides to return home, we totally expect to be turned away, but while he was still a long way

off, his father, who never stopped looking for him, sees him and runs out to meet him. He throws a huge party because his son, who was lost, has now been found. It's one of the most captivating stories of grace and forgiveness in the entire Bible.

There's another story in chapter 15 about a woman who lost a precious coin. She was so distraught over it that she tore up her entire house looking for it. And when she finally found it, she invited her friends over and threw a big party. Notice a theme?

All of these stories were told because of one statement at the beginning of the chapter. And, it's really more of an accusation against Jesus than it is a statement. Look at it with me...(READ Lk. 15:1-2)

"Sinners" were a class of people the religious leaders deemed to be living immoral lives and working in questionable occupations. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law did everything they could to stay away from people like that, and yet these are the very people Jesus moved towards. The accusation, which they made against him more than once, is that Jesus welcomes these religious outcasts and eats with them.

And that word "Welcome" is interesting. Elsewhere it means *eagerly searching and awaiting*. It's like saying we will welcome Spring when it arrives, and while we wait for it, we are eagerly searching for signs that it's almost here. Flowers blooming, trees budding, grass turning green. We welcome the arrival of Spring as we eagerly wait for it and look for signs that it's on its way.

That's how Jesus treated the outcast and the marginalized. The ones who felt like they didn't belong, or were made to feel that way. Jesus searched for them. He longed for them. He waited and watched for them. He welcomes sinners like me and like you and gives us a place to belong. That's Jesus' posture towards us. He seeks us, receives us, welcomes us, and rejoices when we are found.

And to make God's heart for the outcast known, Jesus tells three stories about lost things being found, and the party that ensues when they are. And, the first story, is about a lost sheep. Look at it with me, starting in verse 3...(READ vs. 3-7)

Again, a parable is just an ordinary story about an extraordinary Kingdom. So, when Jesus wants to teach us about God's heart for those who feel like they're lost and don't belong, he says it's kinda like this shepherd who had 100 sheep, but one is missing, so he leaves the 99 to go looking for the 1.

Now, if I'm honest, that seems a little ridiculous to me. Let the one fend for himself! 99 stayed where they were supposed to be and only one of them wandered off. Maybe it's a little survival of the fittest going on and whatever happens is on him! But then I step back and realize that Jesus is talking about me. I'm the one. I'm the wanderer. Just ask my wife. Whenever we go somewhere, she has a harder time keeping track of me than she does the girls! In Israel, I was always one of the last to get on the bus.

I'm the lost sheep, and so are you. It's not a very flattering label, but it's probably more accurate than we care to admit. Sheep are stubborn, they get lost easily, and when they separate from the herd, they get into some trouble. I don't know about you, but that describes me pretty well.

So, while my natural reaction is to write off the one to protect the 99, the shepherd, knows that the one lost sheep is lonely, unprotected, vulnerable, and unable to care for itself. And I think that speaks volumes to why Jesus, our Good Shepherd, comes looking for us, too.

There are a few things we learn from this parable, but the most obvious is that **Jesus came looking for lost people.** In fact, when Jesus sums up his mission just a few chapters later in **Luke 19:10**, he says, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** That's what Jesus came to do. He came to rescue us and give us a place to belong.

Isaiah 52:6 says, **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way."** We've all wandered off at one time or another and have felt the sting of sin and separation. We've felt the pain of brokenness. Broken lives, broken relationships, broken promises. All of us have been there and felt that at one point or another. We all know what it's like to feel lost and alone and without hope. We all know what it's like to feel like we don't belong and be judged by others.

And as we've wandered off into the dangerous, unprotected, open land of our sin, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, doesn't say, "Well, it serves you right! You're gonna get what you have coming to you!" Instead, he comes searching for us! And he doesn't call off the search until we're found and brought back home. There's a persistency in these three stories and it reflects the persistent, relentless, reckless love of God that never stops pursuing us, no matter what it costs. We keep running and God keeps trying to woo our hearts back to Him.

In other words...and don't miss this...**You're never too lost for God's grace to find you.** Never. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done. It doesn't matter how long you've been running or how far you've gone. None of that matters. You are never too lost for God's grace to find you.

And, when He does find you, like a loving, gentle shepherd, Jesus joyfully picks you up, puts you on his shoulders, and carries you back home, to the place where you belong. A place where your heart is safe and your soul is provided for and protected. A place of rest, where you can heal and find hope.

But notice, the climax of the story isn't when the lost sheep is found. The climax is the party that happens afterwards! The moral of this story isn't that Jesus came looking for lost people, or that you're never too lost for God's grace to find you. The point Jesus is trying to make in this story is an accusation of his own against those religious people who thought they were God's

favorites. The moral of the three stories Jesus tells in Luke 15 is that **There's a party in Heaven when someone lost is found!**

Just as the father celebrates when the son returns and the woman throws a party when she finds her lost coin, the shepherd and his friends party over finding just ONE lost sheep! What Jesus wants us to understand through these stories is that God rejoices when one person enters the Kingdom of Heaven...and so do those who are close to Him.

C.S. Lewis once wrote that **"Joy is the serious business of Heaven."** And there is some serious joy in Heaven when someone who was lost is found. Someone who was far from God comes near.

And so, while these religious leaders are grumbling and complaining that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them, Jesus says, "Listen guys, if you can't rejoice over what's happening right now...if you can't celebrate that these tax collectors and people you've labeled as 'sinners' are being welcomed into God's Kingdom...if you can't find joy IN THIS...then you may not be as close to God as you think you are."

So, what do these stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son mean for us. A couple of things real quick as we close. And, I want to talk first to those of us who are followers of Jesus. We see in these three stories that God's heart is for those who are lost and living far from Him. It was at the heart of Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost. So, if it's God's heart and Jesus' mission to see lost people found, then it should be at the heart of our lives and our Church, as well.

There are people in your life who are that lost sheep, and God wants to use you to help bring them home. And, one of the ways you can do that is just by simply inviting them to come to church with you. You can do that any Sunday, but next week is Easter, and they might be more willing to come with you on that Sunday than any other.

And so, here's what I want you to do. In the lobby, there are Easter invite cards. I encourage you to grab one, grab 3, grab 10, grab however many you want and hand them out. Invite them to join you for one of our Easter worship gatherings and pray for their heart to be opened to Jesus that morning.

And, if you're here this morning, or joining us online, and you feel far from God, maybe you're not sure what to believe. Maybe you're here and you know full well the extent of your brokenness and sin, but you just keep trying to hide or run from it, but it just keeps finding you. If that's you, you need to know this morning that God loves you.

And you may not believe that. You may not think you can trust me when I say that because you don't feel it, or you've been told something different by others, or you can think of 1,000 reasons why He shouldn't. I get that. I wrestle with all of that, too. But, it doesn't change the fact that He loves you. He loves you more than you can ever know or imagine.

Today, we celebrate Palm Sunday. It's a day to remember when Jesus rode in on the back of a donkey looking for lost sheep, lost coins, and lost sons and daughters like you and like me.

Earlier, I read a verse from Isaiah 53. I want to finish what it says. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Because of His love for you, God sent Jesus to take all of your sin, guilt, and shame, and nail it to the cross so you can find new life and be adopted into His family. He made a way for you to experience His love and grace and He is pursuing your heart in hopes that you'll accept it and enter into a relationship with Him.

So, today, if you're ready to stop running and embrace God's grace and forgiveness...if you're ready to surrender to Jesus and start following Him, He's ready to welcome you home, where you belong.