
Lost or Found – God is with you!

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Salmoon Bashir
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The wheat harvest in Pakistan usually takes place in May or June. After weeks of very intense work, the fields are cleared and that's when the big festival starts. When I was a child, the main attraction of this festival was always the local circus that was set up in those empty fields after the harvest season. I must've been about six or seven years old, when one time, I went to the festival after school without telling my mother. My classmate and next-door neighbor also came with me. He was the same age, and our mothers were close friends. So, off we went, two of us wandering into the circus on our own. We spent hours roaming around, watching motorcycle tricks, dances, all the strange and exciting things, hungrily staring at street vendor carts filled with delicious food.

By the time I came home, my mother and the rest of my family were panicking. They had searched for us in all the nearby fields but no sign of us. So, when I finally came home, instead of celebrating my little adventure, I was scolded and interrogated. No one was calling friends and family to rejoice and celebrate my return but instead I met the disciplinary side of motherly love which does not need further elaboration. I could even hear the cries of my friend next door. Instead of rejoicing we both were wailing and gnashing our teeth.

But that was not the case in the gospel story we just read. In Luke 15, there is no shame when someone is lost. There is joy when they're found. There is a celebration for the whole crowd, and there is a celebration for the one individual who comes back.

Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who goes after a lost sheep, and of a woman who searches until she finds her lost coin. These are not just nice illustrations. They show us the heart of God which is tender, full of mercy and love for each one of his children. The shepherd will not rest until the sheep is safe again. The woman will not stop sweeping until that coin turns up. And when the lost is found, there is joy. One story is about bringing someone back into the flock. The other is about recovering what was already in the house. Either way, the gospel is clear: God does not give up on his children, whether they have wandered far away or slipped through the cracks right at home.

Luke sets the scene by telling us who was listening. Sinners and tax collectors were drawing near to Jesus. One was despised by the religious authorities, and the others written off by society. And yet, they were the ones eager to hear him. At the same time, Pharisees and Scribes were muttering their disapproval. Jesus was used to this because Jesus is for the crowd, and Jesus is for the individual.

The Greek word Luke uses, ΠΛΗΘΥΣΜΟΣ, means a multitude, an abundance, a mixed crowd pressed together. And that's what we see in Luke's gospel. Some were desperate and needy, sick and hungry. Some were curious, just trying to figure out who Jesus really was. Some were sinners and tax collectors, weighed down by shame but finding welcome. Some were Pharisees and Scribes, critical and suspicious. Some were disciples, deeply committed. And then there were ordinary people - farmers, mothers, travelers, swept up in the moment. Luke's crowd is humanity in all its forms - broken, searching, resistant, devoted, undecided. And in that mix, Jesus tells these parables of joy, making it clear that every single person matters to God.

A crowd of one hundred sheep - Jesus teaches that when even one wanders off, the good shepherd goes to find it. The good shepherd is for the crowd of ninety-nine, and he is for the lost one.

Not long ago, I was having a conversation with a dear friend about this gospel reading. We were discussing

questions like what about the ninety-nine? Were they really safe when the shepherd left to look for the one? Do they stay together, or do they scatter too? How devoted are they when the shepherd seems far? And my friend said something that stayed with me: maybe when Jesus goes to seek the one, he does not abandon the ninety-nine. His presence does not run out. His care does not divide. He leaves his Love with them, so neither the one nor the ninety-nine are ever apart from him. Jesus is here, and Jesus is there too. He holds the crowd, and he searches for the individual. That's the mystery of the good shepherd.

That's the heart of this parable. Jesus is saving the one, not because the ninety-nine do not matter, but because the one matters too. The good shepherd went out of his way because you matter. Your life counts. Your dignity matters to God. And if you are part of the ninety-nine, that does not make you any less loved. His care surrounds you too.

In the same way, when the woman looking for her lost coin, she turned her whole house upside down. Why? Because that coin mattered. Coin number three mattered. Coin number seven mattered. Coin number ten mattered. Each one had value. She did not say, 'well, I still have nine left'. She did not throw the others away because one was lost. All of them mattered. Every penny counts.

That is how it is with God. You matter to Jesus. Whether you see yourself as the third coin, the seventh, or the tenth, your worth is the same. You do not lose value because there are others in the house. Each one is treasured. Each one is searched for. And here's the beautiful thing: God is with the ones safe in the house, and God is with the one still missing. The shepherd has not forgotten you. He knows your name. He will not rest until you are found. And when you are, there will be joy. God is here with me. God is there with you.

That is why both parables end with celebration. When the sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices. When the coin turns up, the woman calls her friends to share her joy. Heaven itself celebrates when one sinner comes home. And the rest of the flock joins in. Whether you feel lost on day one or on day forty-four, whether you see yourself in the crowd of sinners and tax collectors or as someone already found, the truth is the same: you are loved by God. Loved every day of your life, and even before your creation.

And Friends, the gospel begins with a crowd of sinners and tax collectors, and it ends with friends, neighbors, angels, and the whole company of heaven rejoicing together. That's the movement of grace from being lost, to being found, to being celebrated.

Here is the good news for you: you are part of that story. You are not forgotten in the crowd, and you are not overlooked as an individual. The shepherd knows your name. Heaven rejoices for you. Lost or found, in the crowd or on your own, you are never beyond the reach of God's love. Your dignity is held in God's hands. You are loved beyond measure. The good shepherd is here; the good shepherd is there, and the good shepherd will not rest until you are home. And when the good shepherd finds you, or finds the part of you that's been wandering, there will be joy, joy here on earth and joy in heaven. Because the God who is here is also there. The God who holds the crowd also holds you. The God who does not give up will not give up on you because nothing will be impossible with God.
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That is our hope. That is our promise. And that is our celebration. Amen!