

# Lost... Seeking... Finding... Rejoicing

## Luke 15:1-10

Archimedes was getting into the bath one day when all of a sudden it hit him. As he sat in the bath, the water level rose. It was suddenly clear. The volume of his body pushed the water higher up around the edge of the bath. "Eureka", he cried out. "I have found it. The principle that they'll name after me. The volume of any irregular shaped object can be measured by calculating the water that is displaced."



"Eureka...I've found it." This is the joy of discovery. We hear a very similar phrase in the two parables that Jesus tells us today: "Rejoice with me: I have found my lost sheep..."

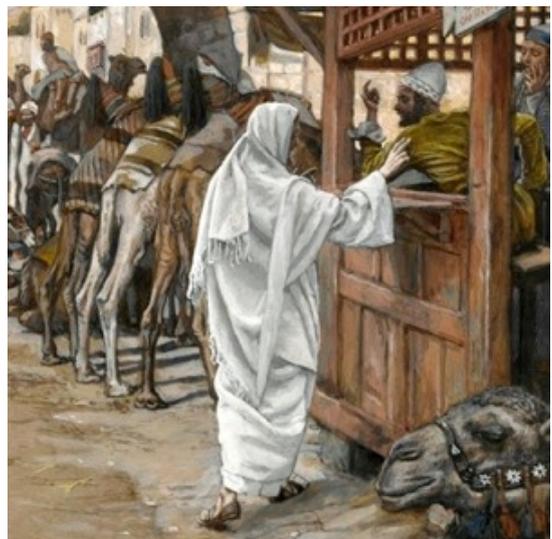


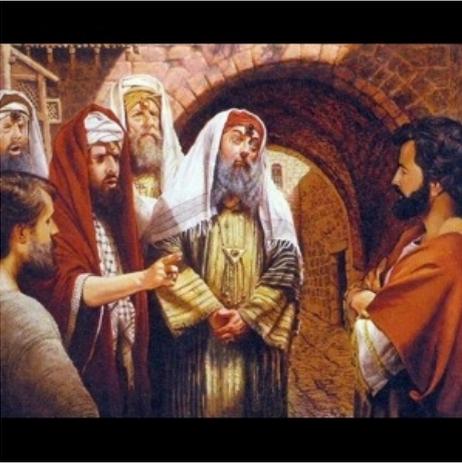
Rejoice with me. I have found my lost coin." We call these parables the lost sheep and the lost coin. But if you look closely, the focus is not on losing but finding.

This chapter forms the heart and soul of Luke's gospel. It gives us an unparalleled glimpse into the heart of our heavenly Father, whose reckless love is lavished on all people. But while this might sound like the most incontestable and popular truth, surprisingly, and sadly, amazing grace proves to be mighty controversial. And it's

the religious leaders of Jesus' day who are the most upset.

Luke tells us, "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus." This happened all the time. It started when Jesus walked up to Levi sitting in his tax booth and said to him, "Follow me." And "Levi got up, left everything, and followed him." And not only that, but he also invited Jesus to a banquet in his house to celebrate his being found by Jesus. And remember Jesus' calling a man named Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and invite him to dinner. He was a tax collector too, another person found by Jesus, captivated by his invitation. They recognised in Jesus that the kingdom of God had come near, and even more surprisingly, that they were welcomed by God.





And this was the problem for the Pharisees. They didn't expect God to be so reckless with grace. And so they murmured, exasperatedly asking Jesus, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Tax collectors were considered crooks, skimming off their margin before they sent off their remittance to their Roman overlords. And sinners meant then what it means now — people whose lives were a big mess, scandal prone.

Jesus answers their please explain: "Those who are well have

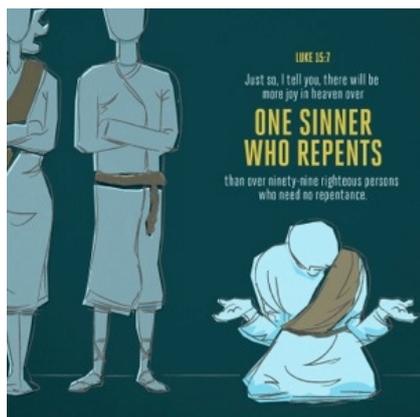
no need of a doctor, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." So, again, patiently, creatively, Jesus opens a window into the way the kingdom operates. He starts with a question, "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not go after the ninety-nine on the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?" Jesus put the question in such a way that he expects the answer yes? But is that the obvious answer?



Shepherds would lead their sheep out to find pasture out in the semi-arid regions of Israel. There were no fences to keep the sheep in, and great danger all around; wild animals, inhospitable terrain. The shepherd would counts his flock every day. Surely losing one is acceptable, given the risk factors. But that's not the way Jesus takes the story. This shepherd is desperate to find the one lost sheep. He leaves the 99 in order to go out and find that recalcitrant 100th. And when he finds the pesky sheep, he lifts it on his shoulders. Just like the picture that the prophet Isaiah paints of God, who "tends his flock like a shepherd, [who] gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart, [who] gently leads those who have young."

The shepherd returns home, with the found sheep, and rounds up his loved ones and his neighbours and shares his joy with the community. "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."

The same thing happens in the following parable. A woman loses a coin, and turns her house upside down in an attempt to find it. She “searches carefully, diligently...” This doesn’t just take five minutes. There’s intent and there’s effort. Finally the coin is located. She, too, calls together the community, and asks them to rejoice with her. “I have found the coin that had lost.” In either case, we don’t know whether loved ones and friends were excited and shared the joy of discovery. We know that the Pharisees weren’t. Which is more than a pity given their claim to follow the law of God strictly.

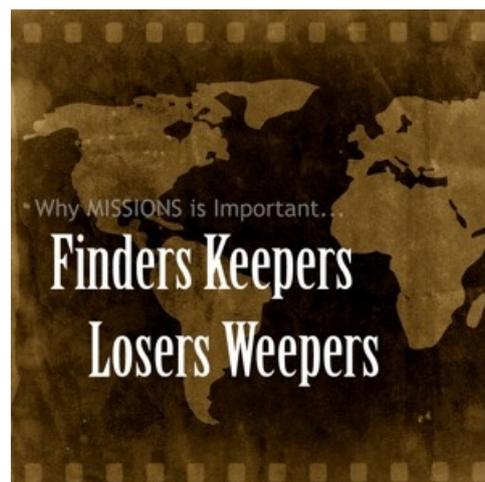


This parable isn’t about money, or sheep, of course. It’s about the God who searches diligently for the lost and whose heart is filled with joy that another space at his heavenly banquet table is filled. He says, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance. ...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

We know that the Pharisees considered themselves righteous. They had no need of repentance. Luke writes in chapter 7: “The tax-collectors acknowledged the justice of God, because they

had been baptized with John’s baptism [which was a baptism of repentance]. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves.” And so there was no joy, only legalism and judgementalism, and a sneering contempt for both Jesus and the people he was finding, and giving life to. Who’s lost now? We know the sad truth, “all people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But the good news follows: “God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace that you have been saved.” Lost, then found, every one of us.

You know the saying, “Finders keepers, losers weepers.” Let’s apply this to God, but reverse the order. God weeps. God’s heart broke at the breakdown of relationship between him and his creation, caused by sin. His response was not coolly rational, doing the sums, working out what break even meant, writing off a percentage as loss. No, his response came straight from the heart, in the form of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s living, breathing rescue mission. No stone is left unturned as Jesus reaches out to those lost to God. He embodies God’s love, nowhere more than in the cross, where in his body he bears on his shoulders the burden of our alienation from God. He carries it willingly, and he consigns it to hell. There is joy in heaven at his resurrection. In Jesus own words: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”



It’s not always easy to listen to Jesus’ parables. We have to work out where we fit in. Jesus addresses those on the inside, God’s chosen people. That’s us, isn’t it? People who have been found by God, adopted into the body of Christ, called in community into the church. “I once was lost, but now am found” is our song. This is the good news we share. But how do our lives display

the height, breadth and depth of God's love? And how does this love inform the decisions we have soon to make. Our Coordinator for Gather and Grow Ministry, Dania Ahern, wrote an article in last week's Sunday Extra, about one of our congregation's values: "Welcome all people unconditionally in the name of Christ."

What is Jesus saying to us today as it relates to this value and how we live it out? What might they be saying about the time, energy and money we invest in seeking the lost in our community? What about those who have been quietly and sadly lost from this worshipping community over the years? Is the pastoral care in our congregation focused solely on the ninety-nine, or does it consider the one lost sheep? Do we all acknowledge that we have ourselves been found, in an act of sovereign grace? Do we have confidence that God continues the search, hour by hour, day and day, and asks us to share in the joy of discovery?



Welcome all people unconditionally in the name of Christ.

**The best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is guided participation in a community of practice where people are vibrantly, passionately risking themselves together in lives of faith in a world crying out for the love of Christ.**

Our Coordinator for Child and Family Ministry, Keren Loffler, wrote an article for the latest edition of *The Lutheran*. It's called "Partnership starts at birth", and it's about the way that congregations can support families in forming children in faith, letting them celebrate their foundness in God, if you like. Keren quotes an American theologian, Joyce Ann Mercer, who says: "The best curriculum for forming children, youth, and anyone else in Christian faith is guided participation in a community of practice where people are vibrantly, passionately risking themselves together in lives of faith in a world crying out for the love of Christ."

This is the kind of church that rejoices in the God who finds, and who welcomes all as once lost, but now found, brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.