

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
14th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 11, 2022
Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Sermon: Home at Last

Have you ever lost something very important to you? Have you lost your cell phone, your wallet, your keys, or something that just meant a great deal to you but wasn't very valuable?

On our recent trip to Illinois and Michigan, when we were taking our children to college, we lost something. It wasn't of great value, and we could replace it, but it was something we needed. It was our dog's harness. We had her leash, but somehow in all our moving in and out of the car, it fell out somewhere. My husband searched the back of the car and around the car at our daughter's school, but it was not found. The last time we saw it was August 25th. The rest of the trip home we wondered where we could have lost it. We bought a new harness in Michigan for Annie, our dog, and resigned ourselves to the fact that it was lost. Last Sunday after church I got a text message with a picture attached from our daughter at college. She had been taking a walk that morning and found in the grass, near her house where she is living, Annie's harness. Over a week later, what was lost had been found. We rejoiced at this finding!

Another story of ours is a lost winter glove. When we lived overseas with our children, we would ride public buses and sometimes we would take a taxi to the store because we didn't have a car. This one time, our daughter lost one winter glove either in the taxi or getting out of the taxi. We couldn't find it and didn't know how to find the taxi driver. We bought new winter gloves and knew we would never see the other glove again. For some reason, we kept the other glove. Months later, when it was now Summer, we were out in the city shopping for food, and we heard someone yelling. We turned to look at what was happening, and this man came running towards us with our daughter's winter glove that she had lost. The taxi driver had found her glove in his car and kept it for months hoping to see us again to return it. What

had been lost was now found! We rejoiced over this kind man and the return of the lost glove.

I'm sure you have many stories of something you lost and then found. It is difficult when we lose something. It becomes the focus of our attention, and we sometimes can't rest until we've found it.

The fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel has three parables, and each one is about something lost. The first speaks of a lost sheep and the second a lost coin. The third parable is about a lost son. We will look at the first two parables this morning.

Luke tells us that tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear what Jesus had to say. They were ready to listen to him. The Jewish religious leaders were not pleased with the types of people Jesus associated with and told him so. Jesus' words about the lost sheep and the lost coin helps us understand why Jesus was willing to be with sinners and tax collectors.

Jesus was a very real threat to the religious status quo, and the Jewish leaders knew it. The Pharisees and scribes took issue with almost everything Jesus said and did. To them, Jesus was a false teacher, a heretic, and someone that needed to be watched. Jesus told the Pharisees that they had their priorities all mixed up. As far as the Pharisees were concerned, Jesus spent far too much of his time with the wrong people and even sat down to eat with them.

Jesus' willingness to associate with these tax collectors changed the lives of many, including Matthew, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he wrote the first of the four gospels in the New Testament. The other group Jesus associated with were called "sinners." This group included prostitutes, thieves and others.

In Jesus' first parable, he describes a man who had a hundred sheep and lost one of them. He left the ninety-nine in a safe place and went out looking for that one lost sheep. His efforts were rewarded when he found the lost sheep and carried it home over his shoulders. He rejoiced when he found it, and when he returned home he called his friends together and they also rejoiced with him.

Jesus' parable reminds us that just one sheep is very important to the shepherd. The shepherd's search is a wonderful image of God seeking the lost so that they can enjoy salvation with their shepherd. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, I lay down my life for the sheep." (John 10) Should we wander away from the safety of the flock, we become instantly vulnerable to all kinds of things. Sheep keep their heads down eating and wander away from the flock not knowing they are lost. They didn't keep their eyes on the shepherd.

People sometimes wander away from the community of believers without really noticing what's happened. The pandemic has caused many people to wander away from the church and not want to be in fellowship. They fill their time on Sunday morning doing something else besides coming to worship and growing in their relationship with God and being in relationship with other believers.

Jesus is the Shepherd of the sheep – past, present and future. He went to the cross to die for all his sheep. Jesus is both the Lamb and the Shepherd. He's the sacrificial lamb who shed his blood to forgive our sins. Jesus is also the Shepherd who seeks out the lost and offers them a home to come to.

Even in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 34:11-15 it talks about the Good Shepherd. It says, *"For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. I will bring them **back home** to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live...I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord."*

One lost sheep breaks the shepherd's heart, so the shepherd searches until he finds the sheep. The sheep is precious to the shepherd. Laying the sheep on his shoulders is a gesture of the shepherd's gentleness to the lost sheep and the shepherd rejoices. The shepherd's joy cannot be contained but overflows throughout the neighborhood.

Verse 7 says, "I tell you that even so there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance." We need to recapture this love for the lost and celebrate the lost being found.

The second parable Jesus told is similar to the first. This time the lost item was not a sheep but a lost coin. It was worth about a day's wages back then, and it was lost somewhere in the house and the woman swept the floor hoping to locate it. She spared no effort and cleaned her whole house looking for it. Have any of you done that before? You clean the house looking for something. She was rewarded for her diligence, and she rejoiced at finding what was lost and called her friends together to celebrate with her.

The central idea of the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin is that God actively seeks those whose sin has taken them far away from his presence. We see God pursuing his rebellious people throughout scripture. God loves us, seeks us, pursues us, longs to bring us into his kingdom. When we choose to be found, to turn from sin and enter into his loving embrace, he welcomes us into his kingdom and fellowship with great celebration. The Pharisees focused on rules to get into the kingdom and Jesus focused on forgiveness and love. Jesus told his followers that sin results from a heart that is far away from God.

Psalm 95:7 says, "Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today!"

The Good Shepherd, Jesus, is always looking for lost sinners, just like the shepherd keeps searching for runaway sheep. When one of those sinners turns his heart away from sin and back to God, when the person accepts the rescue that Jesus offers him, then all of heaven rejoices.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus said, "*The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them.*" To Jesus this is the most important thing in the world. That is why Jesus was willing to die on the cross so that we could be forgiven.

If we are lost, it's not because God lost us; it is because our sin has caused us to wander far away from God. God never stops loving us, even if we run away from Him. A parent never stops loving their children even under the most difficult of circumstances.

Who are the lost? Many are lost to addictions, there are those who simply drift away and are now outside our fold, there are those who are angry at God and are turned off to the church. There are many who are lost and don't even know they are lost and need finding. I am sure you have friends and family members who are lost, and need finding and need to come home at last.

May we be a part of the search to find and pray for those who are lost. When we realize the gravity of being lost, we begin to realize the joy of being found and then we can come home at last.

A church is a place to come home to when you are lost and feeling alone. We need to search for the lost, find them, and celebrate their homecoming.

These empty pews tell us that many out in the world are lost and they haven't been found. Many people don't know they are lost. They don't have an eternal home with Jesus or a church home to know God's love for them. We want the lost to know their Good Shepherd because he came to seek and to save the lost.

Isn't it nice to have peace with God and to say to him, "I am home at last."

I pray that this Fall we will be a church that prays for the lost and searches for the lost so when we find them we can rejoice and celebrate and bring them "Home at Last."