

Trinity 3
June 25, 2023

“The Story of the Finder”
Luke 15:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Saints,

It’s an uncomfortable feeling being lost. A sinking, very helpless desperation sets in. ‘What have I done? How did I get here? I thought I knew where I was going, but now I realize that I have no idea where I am or where I am going or even how to get back.’ Suddenly, with a surge of adrenaline, your face flushes and your heart starts beating double-time, and the panic hits, and a frantic fear ties knots in your belly. Like a maniac, you desperately search this way and that, but the reality becomes more and more clear: you are lost, and the only way out of this situation is for someone to come and find you.

Such is the case for little sheep who love to wander. Such is the case for those who are never quite satisfied with the grass on this side of the pasture. ‘Stay here!’ says the voice of their Shepherd, but ‘Ooo, look at that!’ say the sheep. It’s foolishness, no doubt about it. They know it’s dangerous to go alone, but ‘Mmm...that new grass is so sweet!’

Off one goes, a little further and a little further, slowly cauterizing his conscience until he doesn’t feel the twinge of guilt for the distance between himself and the flock...between himself and the Shepherd. The sheep can still look back and see the rest...but then suddenly, not anymore. Further and further into a spin-cycle of selfishness...that sheep only thinking about that sheep. Living as though the Shepherd did not matter and as if the sheep mattered most.

And such is the story of the lost little sheep whom Jesus came to save.

But this story is not so much about the story of the lost as the story of the Finder.

You see, the Finder – Jesus – is accused of finding the wrong ones. The Finder has found lost ones – He has welcomed tax collectors and sinners – those that would sell out to the Romans and those that would sell themselves. They’re seen as the worst of the worst...the seedy underbelly of society...and the Pharisees and Scribes grumbled about Jesus, saying, **“This man receives sinners and eats with them.”**

And so Jesus, with parables, tells the story of the Finder.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety- nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."

Now, Jesus opens this parable with the question that makes it seem like this is the thing that everyone would do. "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them..." And everyone can probably track up until that point. Even if you don't really know the art of 1st -century shepherding, you can imagine this much. A sheep wandering off...getting lost. But that's where it ends. Because how would things go if you or I were the one searching all over the place, slopping through streams, slogging through mud, crashing through brambles? You're hot, you're frustrated, you're tired. And so when Jesus gets to the part about when he finds it...well, you and I can imagine what that moment is going to be like, but I'm pretty sure it's not going to involve rejoicing and a free ride on the shoulders, with all the thorns poking your neck and the muddy sheep dripping grime down your back. That sheep is walking home! And...no party when we get home!

And Jesus' second parable continues:

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost."

What woman does not do this?, Jesus asks. But I'd say, what woman does? I mean, I'm frugal and don't like losing money; but if I find a coin that was lost, I'm NOT going to hold a party and rejoice with friends and neighbors. Parties cost money, and friends and neighbors can work their way through a lot of food in a hurry; which tells me that, in celebrating the rescue of one silver coin, I could end up spending three more! If that's the case, it would cost the woman a lot less just to write off the lost coin and be happy with the nine.

But remember, this is a story not so much about the lost, but about the Finder. This is a story about Jesus. And Jesus isn't in the flesh to give tips on ranching or accounting. He is in the flesh to save you. As St. Paul says in our epistle, **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life."**

It would be much easier and cheaper to write off such a sheep as lost. But to find it, the Shepherd pays with His own holy, precious blood. We wrongly picture sheep as these cute, innocent, vulnerable creatures; and so if we are the lost sheep, we must be cute, innocent, and vulnerable creatures that are just waiting to be rescued and deserve to be saved. But in reality – what Scripture says about us is that we are sheep who actively plot against the Shepherd, who wander this way and that into sin, and who then kick and bite when the Shepherd finds and rescues us before the wolves devour.

Far from an innocent victim, you are by nature a rebellious sheep. Rather than leave you to the wolves, the Shepherd saved you. He didn't turn around. He didn't say to Himself, "Forget it! This miserable sinner isn't worth it!" He didn't ask Himself, "Why am I doing it? Why am I giving my life for someone who doesn't even want anything to do with me?" Instead, Jesus just kept searching out His lost little sheep. Even when He had the opportunity to get out of it...to deny everything and just walk away from His crucifixion...to say he wasn't really the King of the Jews and thus be set free...but He didn't do it, because He wanted to find you.

So, Jesus got even dirtier. He took spit in His face. He took the scourging, the beatings. He took the mockery and the abuse. He took the nails in His hands...in His feet. He took the crucifixion. The Son of God. The only one to wear human flesh without sin. He took the form of condemnation reserved for common criminals...all in order to find you.

All of Christ's life was dedicated to this cause...all of human history wrapped around this very thing: Jesus is the Finder, and He has come to seek and to save the lost.

And consider this, dear saints: when the Lord finds you and forgives you, the angels of heaven don't shake their heads because He's wasting His precious time and blood on the likes of you. No, all of heaven rejoices when you repent, because all of heaven rejoices in Christ – in His love and the repentance that He's given you.

May the rejoicing of the Shepherd who has found His lost sheep be ours when our flock is together. May the searching of the woman be ours for the precious coin among us who is lost. May the joy of the angels be ours when one lost one is brought home again. It's the work of Jesus. It's the story of the Finder. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord, to life everlasting. Amen.

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