

## Luke 15:1-10

These stories of Jesus are not very flattering. We are pictured either as sheep, or as a woman's silver coins. Neither one makes us feel good all over. I'm not sure what a sheep is worth, but those who believe in reincarnation would not want to come back as one. And that silver coin, a drachma, was worth only about sixteen cents. It hardly makes sense for the woman to spend so much time and energy searching for that lost coin. It makes more sense for the man to go out in search of the lost sheep, but why does he, and the woman too, throw a neighborhood block party when their search proves to be successful? Even if your neighbor in Augusta were to find a quarter, is she going to call you over to celebrate with her? And sheep get lost all the time. What is the sense of celebrating when one of these lost sheep is found?

These stories may not make sense to us because we're not in the place of the man or the woman; we're in the place of the thing that gets lost--the sheep and the coins. If you're a sheep, and some other sheep in the flock wanders away and gets lost, it's not going to ruin your day. You're not going to stop grazing and start searching. But your shepherd will. That's because you all belong to him. As the owner of the sheep, he cares for them...all of them. And when one of his sheep becomes lost he, as the caring owner, will drop everything and search high and low to find his sheep. Coins do not have feelings. They do not care if another coin becomes lost somewhere in the house. But the woman does care because it's her coin. She values it not because it's worth a whopping sixteen cents, but because it belongs to her.

Friend, you belong to Jesus. He is the man in the story who owns the sheep. He is the woman, although He is not a woman, but He is like the woman who owns the silver coins. And you may not be worth much, especially in your own eyes. You are very much aware of your faults and shortcomings, as I am of mine. As Paul cried, "I am the chief of sinners!" so, too, you and I see very clearly that we are full of sin.

For one thing, we do not get along great with all the other sheep. We're always bumping into each other. We're putting our dirty feet on the grass where other sheep are grazing. We have words with each other, and not always very nice words. And we like to place blame upon the other sheep within our family, within our congregation. But when we look to the Word of God and hear His accusing Law, we know full well that we are as sinful as all the other sheep in the flock.

And, on the other hand, we're always wandering off and getting lost. Sometimes we're a sheep who wanders away from the flock. We're tempted by something out there in the world, and off we go. And before long we're lost in our sins. And the other sheep in church rarely, if ever, see us in the pew anymore. Sometimes we're a coin that gets lost right there in the house. We're still in the House of God week after week, but we're just as lost as a lost sheep. We listen to the words that are spoken, but our hearts are not hearing them. We taste the Supper of the Lord, but we're not living by that nourishment. Our sins and weaknesses have pulled us away from the Savior. We're still sitting there in His House, but we're lost in the darkness and dust of our sins.

And we may be of the opinion that we're not worth searching for. Why search for a coin worth sixteen cents? Why search for a wandering, disobedient sheep? Here's why: because you belong to Jesus. He claimed you in your baptism. He poured out His blood upon a cross for you. He loves you with an everlasting love. He does not value you because of your talents and abilities, because of what you have done, or can do, for Him. He values you because you are His. You are not your own. He bought you at a great price--His own death on Calvary for you.

These stories in Luke 15, more than anything, are about our loving, merciful, searching Lord. More than just being about lost sheep and lost coins, they are about your Savior who cares for you, and who gets down on His knees searching through choking dust, and who treks up and down hills, across muddy creeks, and through barren wastelands to find you.

Now sometimes I'm not even sure that we want to be found. For a while, a sheep may enjoy itself being off in the wild country on its own. Immorality is fun to the sinful flesh. Living for yourself and doing what you want to do, without all of those rules of God to follow, is just what our Old Adam loves. It may not be until we end up in the pigpen with the Prodigal Son that we awaken to the truth that we need to be found.

These stories of Jesus are such good news for wandering sinners like us. When He finds His lost sheep, He does not beat it for running away. There are no angry words spoken. But, rejoicing, He carries it home on His shoulders. And when the sheep and the coin are found, it's time to celebrate. All heaven rejoices over even one sinner who repents. Not over on sinner who repents and then promptly falls away again. Not over a sheep who is found and then runs off again. But who repents...living a life of repentance in Christ Jesus.

And this is what it means to be found by Jesus...to repent. Not to say, "I'm sorry," here in church with the intention to go out and sin again. But to repent. To lay our sins on Jesus and say, "Here, Jesus, take them. I don't want to do them ever again."

Dear repentant sheep and coins, you have been found by a merciful Lord. Jesus forgives you. He forgives you for the sinful manner in which you and I have treated His sheep and His coins. He forgives you for going out and getting lost. Whether you've been lost for one day or for ten years or more, Jesus has nothing but mercy for you. And as you believe this, why would you ever want to run away into sin again? You are forgiven; so why would you ever want to run away from His House of Mercy? Stay with your Shepherd. Keep yourself where His voice is heard, where His flesh and blood is given for you to eat and drink. Living in Jesus' forgiveness, you will be sheep and coins who desire, not to wander away and become lost, but to receive the good and gracious gifts of your Lord and Master.

Now for those of you here who see yourself, not as the one sheep who was lost, or the one lost coin, but as the nine coins and the ninety-nine sheep who stayed with their shepherd, how do you treat the lost sheep who was found? When a sinner repents, do you welcome that sinner, or do you frown with judging eyes upon him or her? If Jesus receives sinners who repent, who are we to shun them? Jesus doesn't care how much a person gives to the offering plate, or whether they serve a little or a lot, or not at all. He looks not to what the hands are doing, but to the heart. "A broken and contrite heart," He says, "I will not despise."

Do we have wandering sheep who are reluctant to return to our flock not because they are afraid of the Shepherd, but because of the ninety-nine here who may, or may not, truly welcome them? Friends, this should not be. The angels rejoice not when the Sausage Dinner succeeds, not when the roof is patched, the organ is in tune, and we have no more water leaks, but when one sinner repents. Let's rejoice with them. They rejoiced over you when you were baptized. They rejoice over you when Jesus finds you lost in your sins and brings you back repenting. From now on let it be said of Christ Lutheran Church, "They rejoice with the angels in heaven...because like Jesus, they also receive sinners." Amen.