

Lost & Found

Luke 15:1-10
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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The gospel writer Luke tells us that the religious leaders were upset because Jesus was spending time with “tax collectors and sinners.” Jesus has the gall to welcome and eat with them. In other words, he associates with the wrong kind of people. The ones everyone had written off. The ones respectable society had decided weren’t worth the trouble. They are angry because Jesus’ table is too big, too wide, too inclusive. And in response to their complaint about who gets to belong, Jesus tells two short parables: about a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one sheep who is lost, and about a woman who turns her house upside down to find a single lost coin.

But who risks leaving ninety-nine sheep alone in the wilderness for just one? Who tears apart their house for one coin, when nine others remain safe? Jesus suggests that God does. God’s love is not necessarily practical or efficient. It does not calculate “acceptable losses” as our society does. God’s love refuses to write anyone off. God’s love is extravagant. No one is expendable. No one is beyond God’s care.

That was a radical claim in Jesus’ time, and it’s radical in ours. We live in a culture that often treats certain people as disposable:

- immigrants turned away at borders and families separated,
- unhoused neighbors shuffled from street to street, if not to jail, treated as nuisances instead of neighbors,
- whole communities, whether based on race or sexuality or economic status, treated as expendable.

But God does not see anyone, including us, as expendable. In the kingdom of God no loss is acceptable, no one is forgotten. God does not look at a crowd of ninety-nine and say, “Well, that’s good enough.” God goes searching for the one who is missing. And notice: this is not a passive love. It is active, persistent, relentless. The shepherd searches until he finds the sheep. God doesn’t settle for ninety-nine, and neither can we. The woman sweeps and sweeps until she finds the coin. All must be accounted for.

That persistence is a model for us. It’s what discipleship looks like. It asks: What would it look like if the church searched like that—for the missing voices, the marginalized, the silenced, those cast aside? What if we take the risk to swept the corners of our own communities until every child was fed, every elderly person cared for, every outcast welcomed home, every person had shelter, dignity, and belonging? We must search for justice in the broken systems in our nation. We must search for belonging in places where people have been told they don’t belong. This is what it means to be the church. To join God’s search.

But the story doesn’t end with the search, or even with the found. At the end, and at the heart of both parables, there is joy. Not begrudging tolerance. Not “fine, you can come back.” But joy so extravagant it calls for a party and celebration. When God

finds the lost, there is rejoicing. And when we participate in God's work of finding and restoring the lost, our communities can experience that joy too. That joy belongs to all of us, because our liberation is bound together.

Most likely each of us, at some point, has felt like the one sheep who wandered, the one coin that slipped away. Maybe you have felt lost. Lost in grief, in shame, in addiction, in loneliness. Maybe lost because of our own choices. Maybe lost because of circumstances beyond our control. Or maybe you've felt lost because of the labels others have put on you—too different, too unacceptable. The good news is this: God is searching for you. God refuses to give up. And when you are found, the whole community of faith, as the church, is invited to celebrate.

Our own John Calvin once wrote during the Protestant Reformation, "God's love does not cease until it has raised up the one who was lost." That's the heart of our Reformed faith. God's grace goes first. Grace goes searching. Grace does not quit. The kin-dom of God, therefore, is not about efficiency. It is about extravagant love. It is about a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine, and a woman who sweeps the whole house, and a God who refuses to lose any of us.

God is not satisfied when one is lost. Likewise, we cannot be satisfied with justice for some, while others remain lost. So let us live like that—relentlessly seeking, persistently loving, extravagantly rejoicing. Because in God's world, no one is expendable. No one is forgotten. The kin-dom of God is not satisfied with ninety-nine. It insists on one hundred. And joy is always waiting on the other side of the search.

God searches for the lost in our society, God searches after you and me. God is the love that will not let us go.

Amen.

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