

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear him. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> He told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls together his friends and his neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup> “Or what woman who has ten silver coins,<sup>[a]</sup> if she loses one coin, would not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### **Rejoice: The Lost Are Found**

I’m running late and I can’t find my wallet or keys. It’s a familiar scene in our household. For a while I thought I was losing my mind. My keys or wallet would disappear at the most inconvenient time. At first I blamed it on my disorganized life and fading memory but then again I was certain of where I left them. It wasn’t until I realized that our youngest was now tall enough to reach the counter and then the interrogation process began. She stood there batting her eyes, smiling, before running off to her room and returning with, “Daddy, I have your wallet.” That was light years better than the boy’s single word response, “Hiding.” Soon after that I began searching her purse when things would go missing only to find the most interesting things she’s squirreled away, a moldy apple, broken crayons, mystery keys and the chap-stick that always goes missing when I need it.

It’s not fun to find out your daughter has taken your tools but it is a joyous occasion when what was lost is found, especially if you happen to misplace something more important like the children or a child. This week our focus is on the first two parables lost and found. Jesus spoke these parables in response to the grumbling of those who should have been celebrating. They’re frustrated not because their daughter

lost the keys to the camel or ran off with their wallet but rather because Jesus accused them of losing his sheep.

We all know the frustration of losing things. Maybe you have a daughter who hides things. No matter what's missing, we have a God who seeks and saves the lost. While we might focus on our searching for sinners what we need to see is that we are the lost and Jesus has found us. Rejoice.

This is an interesting situation for Jesus. Luke 15:1 *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.* <sup>2</sup> *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* There are only two groups of sinners here. They list, "tax collectors and sinners," as two but really the group is different; there are only two types of people in this world, those who are sinners and those who think they aren't. But an interesting outcast has come to Jesus: the tax collectors. There really isn't anything that we could compare to them today. They won the right to tax their people for Rome. They were the ones who were getting fat and strong off of their brothers and because of this they were rejected socially, excommunicated, and politically view as traitors. They weren't liked or respected. They were unclean and because of that couldn't worship in the temple. Their sacrifices weren't accepted. The church didn't even want their money. There is the tax collector and they are lumped right in with the open sinner. These people are coming to Jesus and the Pharisees are so upset they won't even say Jesus' name.

*This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.* They accuse him of being a friend of sinners. If they only knew how true that is. If Jesus were to only eat with righteous people he'd have to eat by himself. That's kinda the point isn't it. He wouldn't be a savior if he didn't meet with people who didn't need saving. They're like doctors complaining that only sick people come to them. Jesus came for the lost. In order to better explain the obvious Jesus responds to their muttering, *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep."*

Jesus uses a familiar scene; a sheep wanders from the flock. Jesus makes it personal. *Who of you... you'd go out.* You'd search for your lost sheep. But would you return joyfully calling your friends and neighbors about a lost sheep? Maybe a little mutton bbq? Are you rejoicing that sinners see their lost condition and are saved? The

angels in heaven are rejoicing and so is God in their presence. At the same time that heaven rejoices, they grumble among themselves, and Jesus accuses them of being bad Shepherds. Jesus is making an argument from lesser to greater. If you would do these things for a sheep – how much more a human being?

A sheep is lost. They have failed to do their job. On the other hand the Good Shepherd knows his sheep, watches out for them and searches for them if any go missing. But the Pharisees have an excuse. Sheep aren't the sharpest. The Greek word for sheep is one of my favorite. They're known as *probaton*, which means forward moving object. Sheep wander. They keep getting into trouble. They're relatively helpless and mild creatures but that depends on if you are messing with a ram or a ewe. They need a shepherd.

If we were to allegorize this lesson a bit you could say, "Like sheep we get lost." We wander from the flock. Like sheep, we keep grazing, looking at all the green grass that lay before us. Eager and excited to explore the world which God has given, slowly missing Sunday after Sunday – giving up on God's gifts, word and sacrament. We can be foolish sheep trading eternal blessings for worldly wealth, thinking nothing of it. Or as coins we hide in the corners avoiding people afraid others will discover our sinful behavior.

And then the pastor visits, and visits, and eventually gives up because there is no fruit and it's not worth it. Yeah, I admit at times I am a worthless shepherd who has given up. Maybe there are times when you have too.

I don't think any of us grumble or complain when visitors come to church more often than not we are worried and wondering, "What can we do?" We want people to come. We want Jesus to bring family back into the church. These parables serve another purpose as well – the point to the God who searches and saves. *Isaiah* writes, "*All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6) but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" God reminds us he's at work. Ezekiel says, He's personally seeing to it.

The owner went in search of the lost sheep. The 1%. And then upon finding the sheep he puts it on his shoulders. This isn't a little lamb like we see in the paintings. This is a full blown sheep, all 100 fluffy pounds. A sheep cannot find its way home. Once they discover that they are lost, they are terrified. They lay down at the first sheltered place available and start shaking and bleating. When found they are

so terrified they cannot stand or be made to stand. They cannot walk or be led, nor will they respond to the voice of their Shepherd. They must be carried. In the parable of the lost sheep, we see a picture of a man who will stop at nothing to see that the sheep is restored. He is diligent, loving and caring toward the sheep when he finds it. He gently picks up the sheep and puts the sheep on his shoulders to carry the sheep back to town. He doesn't beat the sheep for getting lost, nor give him a lesson in directions, he joyfully returns.

In the parable of the lost coin a woman tears through the whole house, looking for the coin. When she finds it, it is an occasion for great joy and celebration. She has found something valuable to her, not one out of a hundred but one out of ten and she calls her friends and neighbors together and asks them to share her joy. In fact the celebration of both seems like a greater expense than what was lost. Both of these parables leave us with the fact that God is the one who seeks and saves the lost and that he goes to great lengths in search of sinners and then he rejoices.

God wants to be with his people so much so that he himself came down from heaven entered into our world, walked among us, ate with us, suffered, died, rose, and rules this world for us. This is our God who sent his precious son to seek and to save the lost. If only the Pharisees would see that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus came for them too. While they grumble and complain, "he eats with sinners and welcomes them," Jesus confirms, "I want sinners to be with me." He spared no expense. He didn't give up. He even went to those people who didn't think they were sinners and ate with them.

Jesus welcomes and eats with sinners. He also searches for them. We are the lost sheep, we are that lost coin. You are the one over whom the angels rejoice. Though we have broken every commandment God comes to us. He forgives us for grumbling and complaining – gives us every reason to rejoice. We rejoice with one another that we are found. We repent that we daily wander. We give thanks to God for the fact that he welcomes sinners and eats with them. He gives us his body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

We rejoice when he finds others too. That's why every baptism is so special. Jesus paid for the sins of the world, not just for the Pharisee and those who think they're perfect. But for sinners found in prison around the world. God brings them into his kingdom. We rejoice that God has allowed us to participate in the coming of his kingdom. God works through our words and actions, no matter how awkward

they might be. The Word of God has worked in your heart the same miracle it can work in others.

Trusting in his Word we speak his word which takes root in hearts. We speak our Saviors word and watch as he searches for his flock. He promises his word works. He assures us he is searching and rejoicing over sinners found.

And not like my rejoicing as Thea returned my wallet. I didn't give her the contents of my wallet. I didn't host an expensive party, call my friends, but I did use her as a sermon illustration... God doesn't hide waiting for us to return to him. He sends his word. He sends his sons and daughters. He sent his son sweeping every corner, searching everywhere, welcoming sinners and eating with them.