

LOST SHEEP SERMON
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This morning I want you to all participate with me in a little exercise – so get ready

Not physical calisthenics, but calisthenics of the brain – get your brain cells moving while I give you a bit of background here...and then I am going to ask you to do something

First off for background...

We are going to be talking about the story of the **LOST SHEEP** in scripture

Which by the way is in the same section (LUKE 15) as the **LOST SON** (otherwise known as the prodigal son) that we talked about last week

In this section – Luke 15 - also is the story of the **LOST COIN** and we don't have time to talk about that one; (look in your Bibles that I am asking you to bring...see them all?) Lots of things that are lost in this section!

And I want you to know that Luke's gospel is the only gospel that talks about these lost things – primarily because Luke's gospel is the gospel that champions those who are outcast, poor and those who have lost their way...

Luke was a physician so he probably had that compassionate side to him as he was well acquainted with human suffering – so when he writes his

account of Jesus life he is all about caring for the weak and the sick and the suffering...that is why he keenly remembered what Jesus said about being lost and found again...

Second...recognize

The common theme in all of these accounts of being lost is JOY

JOY of the father after finding his lost son; JOY of the woman looking for the lost coin and finding it; and JOY of the shepherd who finds the lost sheep

JOY..JOY...JOY! I've been looking, and looking...and finally...FINALLY I have found what is lost

So are you ready? Do you have your brain cells pumping? Are you awake? Its time to exercise the brain...

OK. So take a look at this slide (TODD – PUT 15 RANDOM ITEMS ON SLIDE eg. A cup, bar of soap, dog collar, flashlight etc)

There are 15 items on this slide. We are showing you this for 15 seconds and I want you to take this all in. Ready? Go...Now....(PUT NEW SLIDE UP WITH ONE ITEM MISSING)

Can anyone tell me which item is now gone?

REPEAT SAME THING A SECOND TIME

Its hard to remember all those items isn't it, and identify the one that is missing?

And, like the shepherd who had the 100 sheep -

- white wooly animals that all look the “same”...how could he tell which one was lost?

Let me ask you this. If I were to put up on the screen...with all the other items ...a picture of your wallet, (or your purse) or your wedding ring, or a photo of your kid or best friend; your car keys... if I were to put those things... – and then in the next slide...I took it away...guess what?

You would know right away what was missing! You would recognize the absence.

Why is that?

Because the item missing in the slide is not just some random item anymore.

The item missing in the slide is something that *you* consider valuable... that you are invested in, that belongs to you.

You would recognize it as being gone, because of the value you place on it – because that item belongs to you! So the first point of this parable of the lost sheep is...

I. YOU ARE OF GREAT VALUE TO GOD

And this I think is the ultimate point of the parable of the lost sheep.

Jesus wants us to know the great value God places on each one of us...

A shepherd has 100 sheep.

To me and to you they all look the same –

To me and to you they are just sheep...annoying, bleating, off-white creatures who have no brain – sheep are notoriously stupid and stubborn.

By the way....

Does anyone remember when I had my husband Tim stand up here and hold a sheep when I did a talk on the 23rd Psalm one hot August morning?

Tim was wearing one of his favorite shirts that morning because he was standing up here in front; and he was excited to do this for me and he was expecting a nice little fluffy lamb...to cradle gently in the crook of his arm

We didn't know that the guy who brought the sheep was going to bring a long legged adolescent gangly thing that looked more like a goat than sheep cause he'd just been shorn...he was actually huge, and scared to death ...its ears were pinned back against its head..it looked wild and freaked out..never been to church before I guess...

We had to chase it around the playground in order to catch it right before worship

And believe me, no one heard a word I said that morning about the peace and beauty of the 23rd psalm because they were all looking at Tim who was struggling to hold this massive scared long legged animal up here, who then ate the top button off of his Tommy Bahamah shirt and swallowed it. I've disliked sheep ever since.

Thanks Jesus for comparing us to sheep – annoying, brainless, stubborn beasts - but I get it.

From God's perspective, we aren't that bright.

We stumble, we fall, we lose our way.

We get scared, we do stupid things, and we end up in a jam.

And yet God values each one of us so much...

If you notice, there isn't much comment about how the sheep gets lost in this story.

Maybe the sheep just took a random walk around the bend, or decided to find a shorter way home. Who knows? Who cares?

Sheep get lost. They aren't that bright. Neither are human beings.

The focus is not on how the sheep got lost and all the things the sheep did wrong...rather it is on this amazing shepherd,

who though he has 100 sheep, who all look the same to an outsider, knows each one of them personally and considers them to be of great value to him.

The shepherd is invested in each individual sheep, and therefore recognizes when one of them is missing.

SO...Its very important that you understand this morning that your story, your experience everything about you down to the last detail is known by your Creator God...

And if you are feeling lost this morning, and there are lot of different ways that we can feel lost, and you cry out to the Lord, he will come, and he will find you, and I guarantee that he will bring you home...

Never ever in scripture do we read that God just shrugs his shoulders when a person goes astray and says, 'Oh well. It was his own fault... never...ever.

Scripture says that God is unwilling that any should perish.

God seeks after people constantly...

And when he finds a sheep who is lost and rescues it...he puts it on his shoulders (emphasizing the weakness and helplessness of the creature without him)...and then rejoices!

And calls his friends to rejoice...and they have a party.

"JOY IS THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF HEAVEN" says CS Lewis, when someone who is lost is found by the Lord. (the common theme throughout)

II. BEING LOST – A GREAT COMPLIMENT

Now some people believe calling someone lost is a put-down.

I get that.

But it's not really a put down.

It's actually a great compliment to be called spiritually lost.

You know why? Rick Warren puts it this way...

He says, ***"There's a difference between losing something and misplacing something. If I misplace something, it means it wasn't important to me. But if I lose it, it's valuable enough for me to try to find it. You misplace a bobby pin; you lose your glasses. People are only lost if they're worth finding.***

Think of it this way:

The value of a masterpiece that's lost doesn't go down when it's lost; it goes up.

Up enough so that the shepherd leaves the 99 in the field in search of the lost one.

Don't ask me why God considers us valuable...I don't understand it.

But he does...

That's why us being found is associated with God's grace because the value he places on us goes beyond our wildest imaginings...

**AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME
I ONCE WAS LOST, BUT NOW AM FOUND
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE**

The psalmist says it well, "***What are humans that you are mindful of them?***" *Who are we God that you would care about us so specifically, so intimately?*

We're just dumb sheep...

I don't know why ... but that's the good news.

You are so valuable to God that he sent a rescue mission out for you when he sent Jesus to earth, and then to the cross.

God knows your name, he knows your story today, every last thing about you...God considers your life to be worth rescuing, and that's a compliment.

When you pray to him, he recognizes your voice. Oh that's Judy praying, or Cynthia, or Mike or Steve...God knows us by name, the scripture says.

He is aware of the details and specifics of you. Some people don't think that is so.

They are always saying, "Oh God has too many other people to worry about. I don't want to bother him with my problems."

That's ridiculous.

What parent would want their child to say, "Mom and Dad are too busy so I am not going to tell them when I am thirsty, or when I have a nightmare, or when I skin my knee. Why should I bother them with all of this small stuff when there is so much trouble going on in the world on a much larger scale..., why would they want to put a bandage on my little scrape?"

What a terrible perception this child has of his parents, who long to care for every need and who want to know every concern their child has.

Its hard for us to conceive of this kind of a God cause the world is growing more and more impersonal, isn't it?

There's so much in our world that is devaluing: from layoffs, to lines, to answering machines and lack of face to face interactions...to paperwork

and security systems because we don't trust each other anymore....its becoming a pretty de-humanizing environment out there

I just found out recently that in 2003

The president of the Arizona State University wrote to the parents of the newly admitted students a letter of congratulations.

Unfortunately, a **glitch** resulted in the following:

"Dear Parent, Congratulations on 987-65-4324's admission to the Arizona State University! We commend you for the significant role that you have played in helping him to prepare for this exciting and critically important time . . . We are fully prepared to assist 987-65-4324 in making a successful transition from high school to college."

As you can imagine, 987-65-4324's father was amused. So, he decided to write the following in response: *"Dear Mr. Olson, Thank you for offering our son, 987-65-4324, or as we affectionately refer to him around the house-987-a position in the A.S.U. class of 2003. His mother, 123-45-6789 and I are very happy that such a prestigious institution of higher education would so personally welcome him.*

Isn't it comforting to know that in such a world, we have a God who **"knows those who are his" (2Tim. 2:19).**

Jesus assured us, **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).**

III. RECOGNIZING THE ONE WHO FINDS US

As God knows us and recognizes us as his own, so we in that process learn to recognize him and trust him as we follow him throughout our lives...as sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd and are comforted by that.

George Buttrick a Presbyterian minister wrote a book on PRAYER that is considered to be one of the most thorough and comprehensive works on prayer ever written. Buttrick writes..."Praying **nebulously for the masses--e.g., 'We humbly beseech Thee for all sorts and conditions of people,' is an inappropriate expression of intercessory prayer. Private intercession should be specific.**"

Why? Because, he explains, "***Genuine love sees faces, not a mass: the good shepherd 'calleth his own sheep by name.'*** (John 10:3).

Genuine love sees faces and recognizes them. Genuine love knows a name, a story, recognizes and rejoices in a specific person for whom they care. And genuine love seeks after that one when they are lost - sends a rescue team - and never gives up...but persists and seeks and pursues... until they are found again.

And I just want to say that I hope as a church we too will be good shepherds to one another. We can't help it if people leave our churches because they die or relocate. We can't help it if people leave our church for other reasons too...

But woe be unto us, folks, if people leave our church because no one recognizes them Sunday after Sunday - or shows them any interest. I hope no one leaves this place because we don't know their names... or even try to get to know them...woe be unto us if people leave because we don't take the time to invest in them as one for whom Christ gave his life; ...and when we see someone in pain who doesn't know which way to turn, woe be unto us if we don't go after them, follow up, get to know them...and never give up... on that person...until they feel found by our love and concern and prayers...and ultimately by God himself. Genuine

love sees faces, knows names, is invested in the specifics of a person's life.

God recognizes each person as his beloved child. We need to recognize them too.

And God recognizes you this morning, in this place, and you aren't here by accident today. You are of great value to him. And maybe,,just maybe... you are recognizing him right now in a new way.... Maybe... his voice is speaking to you, tugging at your heart in some way - calling you into a deeper relationship with him.

Maybe you are a Christian but maybe you are lost too because you've never really believed that you have value, and purpose – you've never really got the amazing truth down deep in your being that your life is incredibly important to God. That he is invested in you.

Maybe you've never taken the first step and asked Jesus to come into your heart and be your Lord. You've got to begin there to be found.

Or maybe you knew Jesus long ago, but disappointment and the discouragement of this life have marred your relationship with him... and in some ways you feel lost in trying to reconnect with God. Or maybe your anxieties and worries and the subtle message from the enemy that its all up to you... has made you forget on some level that the good shepherd, in your weakness is perfectly capable of taking care of you...and will put you on his shoulders, and carry you through whatever it is with sure steps and strong arms.

God is right here...and is seeking you to reconnect with him today, or connect for the first time..

When we are able to pause, listen, become aware, and recognize his voice, his face, his presence with us now – this reawakens hope in us, just like the sheep in the ravine who lost and alone.... when he hears the shepherds voice calling to him in the wilderness knows this to be a familiar friendly voice... and the sound of that voice that he has known so long gives him courage...courage to be able to struggle up to his feet and stand on weak and wobbly legs, and even offer a bleat of response, *in great expectation* because he now knows he will be found, because he has great value in the eyes of the shepherd.

And so do you.

I want to close with a story of a young Brazilian girl, Christina, who was Discontented with her small village and humble home. One day she ran away. Her distraught mother, Maria, immediately set out to find her.

On her way to the bus stop, to begin the search for daughter [Maria] entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all that she possibly could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black-and white photos, she boarded the next bus to Rio de Janeiro.

Maria knew Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up – kind of like those sheep we've been talking about. And, when pride meets hunger, a human will do things that were before unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search in the worst places. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with the reputation for street

walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. She didn't think twice. She had to find her daughter. And at each horrible place she went to, she left her picture—taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each photo she wrote a note. Several weeks later, Christina descended the hotel stairs. What she thought had been her dream had become a nightmare. As she reached the bottom of the stairs, her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked again, and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation.

'Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. I am searching for you and I love you. Please come home.' She did.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ help you to recognize the face of the one who is seeking you today, and may you know your value and be found again by his amazing grace. AMEN
