

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 09/11/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, September 11<sup>th</sup>

Luke 15:1-10

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### The Parable of the Lost Sheep (not the Lost Shepherd)

This week's Gospel lectionary contains the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. These parables are a response to complaints by the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus is engaging tax collectors and sinners - those that the religious community rejects. These familiar parables challenge us to look further. If the lost sheep is celebrating with the shepherd, who are the real lost sheep? We celebrate these parables because they reveal the heart of God and the mission of Christ, yet Jesus tells us the point of these parables is that heaven celebrates when a sinner repents. Jesus engages the lost for a purpose. What of the continued unrepentant sin tolerated in the church today? Who is more lost, the sheep or the shepherd?

#### Luke 15:1-10

*<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

The text begins with a narrated context. Tax collectors and sinners, despised individuals in Jewish society, were all drawing near to Jesus. This is certainly consistent with Jesus' earlier statement: *"And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"* (Luke 5:31,32) and later statement: *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10). The Jewish religious leaders criticize Jesus for his close association - sharing a table - with such undesirables. Jesus here is simply living out the advice He gave in Luke 14:12f.

*<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> 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.' <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

The grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes leads to Jesus responding with the first of these two parables. Jesus begins with a question that suggests the hearers would act the same way as the subject of the parable of the Lost Sheep (v.4). This of course is an intentional insult. What Pharisee would not be insulted if compared to an unclean shepherd? Jesus then describes the reaction of the shepherd when he finds his lost sheep. The celebration seems excessive. The shepherd invites his neighbors over for a celebration. This sets up the explanation of the parable

(v.7). The idea of sin is somewhat different compared to our understanding. Where the Christian understands that we are all sinners (Romans 3:23), the Jews considered those intentionally living outside the Law or those in professions incompatible with the Law (such as shepherds) as sinners.

*<sup>8</sup> "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? <sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Jesus continues with another similar parable which is only found in Luke. Here a woman loses a coin worth approximately one day's wages for a laborer. Again, the plight of the woman with the lost coin is one that is familiar to the hearers of this parable (v.8) but the celebration seems excessive - perhaps it will cost the woman more to celebrate than the value of the coin that was found! Jesus' explanation of the parable (v.10) is very similar to the explanation of the earlier one (v.7). There is joy in Heaven when a sinner repents.

### Reflections

Both parables share a similar structure: One is lost from a larger number (1/100 and 1/10), the subject goes to great lengths to find the lost item, the lost item is found and the subject invites friends to celebrate in a way that seems excessive for the situation, Jesus explains the parable. In both cases Luke invites us to correlate the lost items with sinners and the shepherd and woman with God (after the respective item is lost). Being found in this case correlates with repentance.

As we read this text there is a tendency to focus on the great lengths that God will go to in order to pursue a sinner. After all, a sinner is still His image-bearer. We also contrast the actions of Jesus who engages the lost with the legalistic behavior of the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes who merely sit there and grumble. With all this going on it is easy to overlook the "*Just so, I tell you...*" verses (vv. 7,10). The rejoicing does not occur when the shepherd realizes the sheep is lost or the woman realizes the coin is lost. The rejoicing does not occur when the shepherd goes off in search for the lost sheep or the woman starts to sweep the floor looking for the lost coin. The joy only occurs when the subject is found. Jesus tells us on both occasions that there is joy when a sinner repents (Greek, *metanoia*: namely a transformative change of heart, a spiritual conversion). Note that in both parables (or perhaps double parable), the lost subject did nothing to be found nor responded to the finder in anyway. Repentance here appears to involve the sovereign will of the one doing the finding.

Unfortunately, in our society toleration trumps everything and it is now difficult to critique others. Much of the church is left unable to call out unrepentant sin for fear of sounding like the grumbling Pharisees. Today, the shepherd as well as the sheep are at risk of becoming lost.

