

“According to your steadfast love,
have mercy on us sinners and
wash us through and through.” AMEN!

It's important to note, right away, that
last week's lessons pointed to Jesus' call,
that his followers ought to consider
the cost of discipleship.

That is, consider the suffering that could occur
if they (or we) truly follow Jesus and
obey his teachings.

His point was that there'll be a financial cost,
as well as the cost of relationships with family
that might be fractured when we
follow Jesus.

Consider, also, the potential risk to one's
own personal safety that may occur
when following Jesus.

Our Lord wanted to be sure people in the crowd
knew what they were getting into.

He was not gonna do a “bait and switch” or
demand that people follow Him

“with eye’s wide shut.”

Jesus was open and honest from day one.

Now today, still in the gospel of Luke,
we hear 2 parables from Jesus that teach about
a shepherd that risked

the safety and security of the 99 sheep in order
to save one.

The other parable was about a woman who turned
the house upside down in order to find a lost coin.

When we think deeply about
these two Sunday’s lessons,

it appears that they contradict each other.

The shepherd doesn’t seem to count the cost of
the potential loss of 99 sheep and

the woman doesn’t count the cost when
she celebrates after turning the home
upside down to find a single coin.

She celebrates by gathering all her
friends and neighbors for a party.

Did she count the cost that the coin
she found has to be spent to pay for the party. :-)

The two week's lessons look like Jesus is all over
the proverbial map until we realize that
these parables make no sense

unless verses 1 and 2 are taken as the context.

Verse one and two say:

“Now, the tax collectors and the sinners
were coming near to listen to Jesus.

And the Pharisees and the scribes were
grumbling saying,

‘This one welcomes sinners AND eats with them.’”

Interesting that our translation says, “Fellow.”

It's really just “This one.”

Anyway, it's this interaction of
complaint and grumbling which brings about
the parables.

So we must be sure we distinguish
between this week and last week.

Last week was about the cost of discipleship
in following Jesus.

This week is not about discipleship or following Jesus.

This week is about God's persistent, relentless,
and unyielding search for people who are lost,
for people who feel unloved,
for people that think they could
never belong to God
or community.

These parables are about God's gift of salvation.

God's rescue and recovery, and thus
a gift of restoration given upon all humanity.

The lost are found and we celebrate it. (Pause)

A pastor gave a sermon once about
one of the ways that Christians divide
themselves when it comes to salvation.

The pastor said there are two main streams of
thought when it comes to salvation.

"There's the 'monkey-hold' salvation or
the 'cat-hold' salvation. :-)

The difference in theological viewpoint is seen in the way monkeys and cats protect their young.”

When in danger, the mother monkey will sound an alarm.

The baby monkey will recognize the sound of their momma and come running to cling tightly to her fur while she runs to safety.

A mother cat, on the other hand, runs to pick up her kitten by the nape of the neck in the midst of danger and carries the kitten away in her mouth to safety. (Pause)

So which kind of salvation is God’s?

Monkey-hold or cat-hold?

Does God sound the alarm in Jesus that leads us to come running to Him and then hold onto him tightly, or does God, through Jesus,

take us by the nape of the neck and carry us to the throne of grace? Hmm.

There are arguments for both, but in these parables

it is revealed that Jesus taught
about cat-hold salvation.

As the temple officials, or church officials, or
any religious officials (really) grumble about
who's good enough and about who's
too rotten or nasty to eat with,

Jesus told a story about God in the form of
a shepherd that sought out the lost lamb
in order to bring it home
then rejoice and celebrate.

Then Jesus told a story about God,
in the form of a woman who
searched every corner of her home
to find a lost coin.

Then, upon finding it, she threw a party to celebrate
and invited her friends to rejoice with her.

"The message is clear, our salvation rests in
the care and keeping of a savior that
seeks and search's for the lost... for us.

We do not need to worry about our ability
to grip and hold onto God's coat tails,
for God will not let go of ours."

That's the Gospel news today. (Pause)

Yet, with the gospel comes a duty, a correction,
or an affirmation that is crucial for us to know.

And that is, if you're an insider,
or if I'm an insider,

(most of us are insiders) then we must take care
not to grumble when others are
welcomed inside, too.

For that can sometimes be the first response, right?

Blame, point fingers, marginalized,
and judge who God should
and should not gather in,
or bestow grace upon, and love.

Find me Jesus, but not them...
they're too far gone
is too often the response of Christians.

But, with Jesus, no one is too far gone.

For Jesus everyone is redeemable and
our grumbling might turn to joy. (Pause)

This sense of “lostness” is evident in our society today.

We heard a woman speak last week at
the Prayer Vigil held in response to
the notorious Alligator Alcatraz and
the unjust “round-up” of human beings.

People who are being incarcerated
without due process, often by masked
individuals in unmarked vehicles.

This woman’s husband was arrested in the raid at
the construction site near FSU (3 1/2 months ago)
and sent to a facility in Texas.

She has not been able to contact him since.

She doesn’t know where he is,
she’s left with their three children who weep
for their father, and she weeps
for her husband.

There will be joy when they’re reunited.

It’s a joy we should all hope for, participate in,
and celebrate when it happens. (Pause)

What does “lostness” look like to you?

Separation, estrangement, hopelessness?

Holdfast to know that God searches for you
and scoops you up.

For we need God to find us.

And we rejoice, for God lets no one remain lost forever.

AMEN!