

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Luke 15:1-10 (EHV)**

<sup>1</sup> 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, 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 neighbours 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."

*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may rejoice with Jesus who's come to seek, find, and save the lost. Amen.*

In February 1960 a four-year-old boy went missing from a farm near Guyra, NSW. This prompted 5,000 volunteers, 7 aircraft, 30 police and 80 soldiers to search for him.

For 2 nights and 2 days they searched while his mother knelt at the cross of a local country church, praying to God in heaven for her little boy lost.

In the end this little boy crawled out of a gully asking for his daddy and the nation breathed a sigh of relief! Some of you may also remember Johnny Ashcroft wrote a song called 'Little Boy Lost' about this event. It quickly reached number one, and has been re-recorded several times, including by Jimmy Little and Slim Dusty. A movie was made of the event in 1978.



Knowing the dangers of getting lost in our rugged and beautiful country, many Australians are still worried about those who are lost in our bush. While we can rejoice about those stories where the lost are found, the sad truth is that some are never found.

Today we hear Jesus telling some parables about the lost being found. These parables should resonate with Australians who are often worried about those who are lost.

However, the setting of these parables doesn't talk about the rugged *bush* being where the danger lies, but in the *people* who were grumbling about those who were being found.

Lots of people were coming to hear Jesus. Some of them were sinners and tax collectors who were often at the edge of society and frowned upon by many respectable people. On the other hand, some of those who listened to Jesus were the respectable and religiously faithful Pharisees who too often looked down on the sinners and tax collectors.

The Pharisees, those faithful pillars of good society, were grumbling about the fact Jesus wasn't just talking to those who didn't meet their standards but was even eating and drinking with them. According to the customs of the day, eating and drinking with people not only showed you're friends with them, but that they also come under your protection.

Now Jesus isn't stupid. He can read a crowd as well as he can read people's hearts. He noticed the two groups of people and the way the respected Pharisees were grumbling about those he was eating with. In response he told a series of 3 parables, but we only hear the first 2 today. Both parables start with a question.

For the first one, Jesus asks: "Who of you, if you had 100 sheep, and you lost 1 of them, wouldn't leave 99 in the wilderness so you could go find the lost sheep?"

Now this is a rhetorical question. At first glance it might seem to suggest of course we'd all leave the 99 to hunt for the 1 lost sheep, but would we really? Would we really risk the safety of the 99 sheep that we still have for the sake of 1 lost sheep that we have no guarantee of finding again? Who would really do such a thing because it doesn't make sense!

But that's the point! No matter how much we Australians are concerned for the lost, we don't always seek them out. And if we do, we'd like them to conform to our way of thinking and acting.

After all, if we were to think about those we're willing to search for, is it likely to be those we like, or those who think like us, or those who could make a valuable

contribution to our community? Would we really go to a lot of effort to save troublemakers or those who are annoying or difficult? Instead of searching for them, we're likely to grumble about mischief-makers and quietly whisper "good riddance!"

So, who would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness to go searching for a silly lost sheep? Who would joyfully carry a headstrong lost sheep on their own back once he found it? Who would choose not to return this uncooperative lost sheep to the flock but instead bring it into his own home? Who would rejoice over a recovered lost sheep and invite others to celebrate he's found this recalcitrant stray? Well, it's probably not us!

Similarly, which woman would turn her household upside-down for one lost coin? Then, when she finds it after her diligent and lengthy search, would call her friends over to her house for a party to celebrate the fact she found her coin? Again, this doesn't make sense! Even though we might go to some effort to find our lost things, we wouldn't call a party afterwards, which again is part of the point Jesus is making.

The third parable we don't get to hear today is what we often call the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which ends with the eldest son standing outside the celebration of his prodigal brother returning, grumbling about the fact his father welcomed his sinful brother back home and threw a party for him.

Perhaps a little like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, instead of searching for the lost sinners who don't meet our standards, or who don't play by our rules, or who don't quite believe or practice the same as us (like the sinners and tax collectors of Jesus' day), we're likely to argue against them, grumble about them, roll our eyes at their principles, criticise their way of thinking, or maybe just simply ignore them.

But there is One who searches, finds, carries, welcomes, and rejoices over lost sinners.

Jesus Christ came into this muddled up, mixed up, and cruel world, to seek and save the lost, even if they didn't know they're lost.

After all, did the lost sheep know and worry about the fact it was lost? It may have been having a lovely time nibbling itself lost from one tuft of juicy grass to the next! Similarly, did the lost coin care less it wasn't with the other 9? Of course not! It's an inanimate object which doesn't think or feel!

On the other hand, the *shepherd* knew the sheep was lost and the *woman* knew the coin was lost.

Similarly, Jesus knows we're all lost and in danger.

Now you may not like being told you're lost but think of the alternative.

If you're not lost, then you're 1 of the 99 sheep who weren't found by Jesus the Good Shepherd, you weren't carried on his shoulders, you weren't brought into his home, you weren't rejoiced over, you don't think you need to repent, and you're still grumbling about those lost ones whom Jesus does welcome, carry, feed, and rejoice over.

On the other hand, to be one of the lost ones is good news!

Since Jesus seeks and finds and carries and saves and rejoices over the lost, the fact you're lost means you're precious enough in God's sight that Jesus would seek you out, put you on his broad and loving shoulders, bring you into his own home, and rejoice with all the angels in heaven that you've been found!

After all, this is what Jesus came to do – to seek and save the lost!

This means Jesus was obedient to his Father for the sake of the lost. Jesus sought out the sinners and tax collectors who were lost. Jesus welcomes and eats and drinks with the lost. Jesus heals the lost. Jesus forgives the lost. Jesus willingly died for the lost. Jesus rose again for the lost. And Jesus will take the lost home with him into his eternal kingdom.

Now normally as one of the lost, you might expect to be told off for getting yourselves lost in the first place, but this isn't what happens in the parables. Instead of receiving a good talking to, a spanking, or a divine 'tut-tut-tut!', Jesus and the angels rejoice the lost are found!

What's more, we're not told the sheep, or the coin, did any repenting. The shepherd and the woman did all the work, and not the sheep or the coin. Similarly, Jesus didn't find the sinners and tax collectors because they first repented, but it seems they repented *because* they were found by Jesus.

Therefore, repentance here is quite radical. Repentance in this text isn't turning from your sinful and wicked ways so that you might turn to Jesus to be found and saved, but repentance here is a response to being found by Jesus! Now that you've been found and are safe with Jesus, you're sorry for being lost and are comforted by the forgiving grace of Jesus who sought you out!

Now this might stuff up your ideas of justice. You'd normally expect someone to pay for their wrong first, or for them to be sorry first, or for them to repent first, before they deserve to be found. After all, that stupid sheep didn't deserve to be found and brought back, and it'll probably wander off again. Yet Jesus took it home and rejoiced because *he* found it. Heaven rejoices over Jesus' action of finding the lost who, once they've been found by Jesus repent of their lostness and believe they're now safe in Jesus.

In the same way, none of you deserve to be found and brought into the Kingdom of God, but that's just the point! *You* have nothing to do with it, and you'll probably wander away again through your disobedience. *You* don't deserve it and will never deserve it! Yet *Jesus* continually seeks you out in order to bring you home and rejoice over you because *he* finds you.

Now, you may be tempted to think it's up to you to seek and find more lost people, but the action of seeking, finding, carrying, and bringing home the lost is always Jesus' work.

Instead, Jesus wants you to keep out of the way of his work of finding and saving the lost by not grumbling about those whom he finds and welcomes at his banquet table. And what's more, he wants you to celebrate along with the angels in heaven over every sinner who has been found by Jesus.

Like the shepherd and the woman, Jesus asks you to 'rejoice with me.' So, you come forward to eat and drink with him in joy and thanks. Here at his holy meal, all the little boys and girls lost come together as one to eat and drink with Jesus at the Lord's Supper, celebrating with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven that the lost have been found by Jesus. After all, Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.

*Therefore, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds because you've been found by Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig  
South Burnett Lutheran Parish  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (P19)  
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