

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021

SERMON: SEEKING THE LOST

TEXT: LUKE 15:1-10

Years ago when I was in Bible College, I had a friend who I would argue with. We actually didn't argue as much debated each other. We would occasionally get the odd or worried look from people who passed by worried about our friendship. What they didn't know is that we enjoyed debating as a way of passing the time. It was enjoyable for us to try to defend a position and win our debate.

Unfortunately we live in what is called a #cancel culture. We see examples of this in all walks of life. Just recently Dr. Seuss, Pepe le Pew, and most things associated with the Southern states are being ruled unacceptable. I am not here today to weigh in on these things – perhaps some things are best left to the halls of history. What bothers me is the intolerance of opposing views. Society has seemed to have lost the ability to disagree with civility with one another. Groups with the loudest propaganda machines seem to be able to silence views they have deemed to be unfit. Society is on the defense wondering what will be the target next!

Today as we observe the fifth Sunday of Lent, we look at one of the many times that Jesus defends his ministry with the “religious.” Let's begin by looking at our scripture lesson found in Luke 15:1-10:

15 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ² This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

³ So Jesus told them this story: ⁴ “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home

on his shoulders. ⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

Parable of the Lost Coin

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

In Luke 15 Jesus uses two short and one long parable as a defense of his involvement with the "lost." We are looking at the two short ones – the first commonly known as the parable of the "ninety and nine" and the parable of the "lost coin." The third, which we aren't looking at today, is commonly known as the parable of the "prodigal son."

Jesus is being criticized by the religious elite of the day, that he is spending far too much time with the "fringe of society." They believe that there should be a healthy distance between the "religious" and the "sinner." Eating is far too personal an act and Jesus should stop and be proper.

Jesus' message is about hope, the fact that heaven rejoices at the arrival of one lost sinner. This is the thrust of his ministry and it should be of utmost importance to all who call themselves children of God.

The lesson we need to learn from these two parables is the fact that God is committed to finding the lost.

These parables are so powerful because we can relate to the emotion behind them. Have you ever lost your keys, your wallet, purse, an important document, your child? Losing something is so frustrating and sends you

into panic mode. Frantically you search. Many years ago we lost our oldest who might have been 5 years old in a Costco that was busy. One minute he was right beside us and the next moment he was gone. We frantically searched and called his name and found him very quickly...but I never want that feeling ever again!

Jesus' parables are parables of frustration. The story of the shepherd and the lost sheep would be readily understandable by the agrarian society of the day. The sheep belonged to a modest farm – the average herd being anywhere from twenty to two hundred head of sheep. The shepherd could very well be the owner rather than a hired hand.

There is a lost sheep and the shepherd leaves the other in the field. Are the 99 safe? The parable doesn't really tell us though it is usually assumed that they are. There is still risk being taken. Parables often used the element of surprise or the unexpected to make their point. Is one single sheep worth the risk? I believe that Jesus is making a very strong point to the Pharisees and teachers. They were worried about saving face in their culture. They believed that you disassociated with the less desired of society and that kept your own position elevated. Jesus was pointing out to them and to us today, that God cares about each one of us individually. He knows us and loves us and wants to see us back in our rightful position in his "herd."

This teaching about how God loves all his children regardless of status or stature fall in line with other teachings in the Gospels. In Mark 2 we have the story of the calling of Matthew (Levi) who was a tax collector and considered the foulest of humans within Jewish society. The tax collector was a traitor to his people because he worked with the Roman government. After Matthew accepted Jesus' invitation to be a disciple, he hosted a dinner with Jesus as the guest of honour. We are told that many of the guests were tax collectors. The reaction of the Pharisees was one of shock that Jesus would spend so much time with "scum" (Mark 2:16). Jesus' response to this was:

17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

When the shepherd found his sheep there was cause for celebration! In real life, the shepherd has a vested interest in each of the sheep. They are a valued commodity, but Jesus’ point isn’t about finding lost property, it is about Jesus’ work of proclaiming the good news so that the lost will find their way back to their God.

Isaiah states God’s love wonderfully in Isaiah 40:11:

11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd.

**He will carry the lambs in his arms,
holding them close to his heart.**

He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

THE LOST COIN

The second parable is similar to the first. A woman has lost a coin that is worth a day’s wage for the average worker. It isn’t an exorbitant amount but it means something to the woman. She searches her house from top to bottom. She lights a lamp and methodically sweeps the house until she finds the coin. Again we have a celebration which teaches us about the joy in heaven when a sinner repents.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

What should we understand about these stories? Again we reiterate the fact that God is committed to finding the lost and so should we! Notice that the parable begins with Jesus saying, “Suppose one of you...” Jesus draws us into the story and expects us to be the shepherd or the woman. As professing Christian who are striving to be more like Jesus, we need to have his heart not just his theology. The attitudes expressed in these parables is fundamental to the church accomplishing our God-given mission.

If there is one thing that I have learned in my years of being in the church is the fact that ministry is often messy when done properly. We are often called to reach out to those who are living in a context so different than our own, it frightens us. We worry that we will be ineffectual and somehow fail God. We worry about having people come to our churches that don't look like us, dress like us, or speak like we do and this is where our spiritual snobbery starts to show!

I was once part of a church business meeting where the subject of a bus ministry was brought up. The chief concern was not the cost of the bus, gasoline, or who would drive the bus. The primary concern voiced was, "If we have a bus ministry what type of people might come to our church?"

I believe that every Christian would benefit from serving at a soup kitchen or rescue mission, even once in their lives. I worked for one in Winnipeg for about six months before I moved to Ontario, but I learned a life lesson. It wasn't about feeding the hungry or the state of the impoverished (though those lessons are important!) The lesson came from getting to know the people on a daily basis who came to eat. I would sit at a table with individuals and even families and hear their stories. I soon realized that we were more alike than different and we were different because of horrible circumstance at times beyond the individuals control or as a result of a bad choice often made in a brief moment. These people had dreams and loved ones and lives they desired to obtain once more. And the old adage comes back in a more real way..."there but for the grace of God..."

These parables say as much about the heart of God that engages the uninterested, seeks after those who would willingly hide from His sight, and show unfathomable love to those who have rejected Him. The search is not always easy. At times we will face hurt, shock, anger, and rejection...but it is still vital and worthwhile. Jesus ate with the tax collectors and found a Matthew and a Zacchaeus. We are reminded that we have all at one time been the one out of one hundred or the lost coin. How many of us were introduced to Jesus and his love by an individual (or many individuals) who cared enough to risk rejection or ridicule and now it is our responsibility to do our part for the Kingdom of God.

Evangelism takes time and energy, as we see in the efforts of the shepherd and the woman. It takes investment that may take years of faithful prayer and witness before the individual chooses a relationship with Jesus. Jesus calls us to get out among people and build relationships that allow us to draw others to God. What are you willing to do to see a life found, a relationship restored, and a person included in the family of God?

Let's pray...