

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 15:1-10  
Exodus 32:7-14  
Psalm 51:1-10  
1 Timothy 1:12-17

September 11, 2022  
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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This morning, I want us to consider two things...what it means to be loved and what it means to give love. More specially I want us to consider how it feels to know you are loved by God. Think about how incredible that love is...how incredible that it seeks you out no matter who you are and where you are, no matter what you have done, or what you haven't done.

Unconditional. Generous. Overflowing love that never stops reaching out for you. And then, I am going to ask you to consider what that love means for your life.

But first, I want to do a little wondering about our parables this morning, the parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin. I want us to wonder what Jesus is trying to teach us about love in these well-worn narratives.

To start, we are going to look at three verbs from our Gospel text: to have, to lose, to find. I want us to break them down into their original meaning from the Greek (the language these texts were written in) so that we may consider the deeper meaning and nuance of each word.

“To have”

<sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep... or <sup>8</sup>“Or what woman having ten silver coins...

The verb “to have” is understood to mean to have something in hand, either tangibly or emotionally. Whichever context, it's something you are closely joined with. It matters to you. It has value.

“To lose”

<sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? Or <sup>8</sup>“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully...

“To lose” in the Greek means to destroy, to put out of the way entirely, to render useless. It implies a deep separation from the thing you once held so closely to you. It isn't about simply misplacing something. Instead, the verb “to lose” conveys a sense of grief at what is lost.

“To find”

<sup>6</sup>... ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ And <sup>9</sup>... ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’

“To find” is a rich word in the Greek. It is translated as not just something we stumble upon haphazardly but something we have diligently searched for. It’s what we are able to find by honest inquiry, through examination and observation. It’s what we discover by dedicated practice and experience.

So...we have something tangible that matters to us and has value. We experience a deep separation from what we held closely. We grieve a profound loss. And, we put in the time and effort and practice to mend what has been broken. Those are the larger lessons from our parables.

The sheep and the coin were loved, held closely by the shepherd and the woman. And when the individuals lost something that they loved, a shift happened. A fracture was created that was painful. I imagine a deep sadness coming over the shepherd and the woman as the separation set in.

But because these two people actively sought after their lost items, because they never gave up, because they searched and inquired and examined and observed; because they entered into a practice of *looking* the union between what was lost and what was found was made whole again. The relationship was mended. And the joy that comes from the reunions is tangible. Love was given and love was felt.

It’s a beautiful reminder of how God works in our lives every day. Because just like the sheep and the coin, we will be lost at times. We will harm relationships. We will turn away from God, from what is good and true. We will make decisions that we regret. We will spend time wandering if our lives matter, if we are seen, if we are worth love. When life feels broken, when we feel lost, it can feel as if we will never be found. We lose hope.

And in those moments...we have to remember, we must remember, that we are first and foremost God’s beloved. God has us in the palm of his hand. And because God has us, we have value...unlimited value in God’s eyes. And when we fall away, when we get lost, God is searching for us. God grieves our separation and longs to bring us back. And, God is going to keep seeking us and pulling us back to wholeness no matter how long it takes. That’s how great God’s love is for us.

However, we are human. We aren’t a sheep or a coin. We do have agency over our decisions. Because no matter how much God wants to find us and love us, we need to be willing to be found. We need to be willing to receive God’s love and let it hold us. And we need to be willing to do something with that love.

Remember how active the verb “to find” is in our context. To be found requires dedication and practice, inquiry and observation. God is going to do that for us. But we also need to be willing to enter into that relationship, to practice and inquire and observe and learn and grow along with God. To let God’s love change us and move us and heal us. And, that kind of faithful reciprocity won’t always be easy, but it is necessary.

Which brings me to the question...how will you let God's love change you? How will you embrace it? What does it mean for your life?

Here are two important points I read about this question:

- 1) In the light of these parables, our efforts themselves are best understood as undeserved gifts from a graceful, forgiving, generous God, a God who doesn't "reward" us for living well, but rather loves us back to life in the first place.
- 2) Properly understood, then, the church isn't primarily a circle of moral excellence and respectability. Rather, it's primarily a circle of joy, of celebration, of reveling in what the God of grace and mercy has done, is doing, and will yet do.

I love these two points because they remind us that receiving and applying God's love has two important components: our individual receiving of love and grace and our communal support of one another as a body of Christ. They go hand in hand.

This fall, as a body of Christ we are going to be focusing on what it means to simply be with the love of God and to let that love change us. To ground ourselves in embodied grace and live out a unifying, life-giving practice of community, of building up the body of Christ in powerful, transformative ways.

And so, I am going to ask each of you...to begin a journey, a journey of recommitment. Of opening your heart to God's incredible love for you and let it bring you back to the simple practices and rhythms of our faith. Allow yourself to pray and worship and sing and learn. Allow yourself to care for others and allow yourself to be cared for. Find ways to serve God and the church. Because one thing I have learned over the years...it's not enough to passively practice your faith. Love must be embodied. It isn't just a feeling. It's a commitment. And we all need to be involved.

God is seeking you out and calling you home. And when you allow yourself to truly be found, you can do nothing less than rejoice and celebrate and say...here I am God. Here I am. Amen.