

Lost/Luke 15:1-10
September 7, 2022

Friends, welcome to our first Wednesday Night Worship service. I'm glad we're here and am excited about this new opportunity we have to worship together. I love our Sunday morning worship services, but I'm always looking for new ways that we can be in prayer together and worship God together. I've been thinking and praying about different possibilities for worship together and I thought that bringing back our services on Wednesday nights would be a great starting point. We've had worship or prayer services on Wednesday nights at Northgate in the past. The church apparently stopped doing those several years ago, but I wondered if now might be a good time to resurrect this service. I love the fact that it's in the middle of the week, which gives us an opportunity to be together in between Sundays – I don't know about you, but most of the time, a week feels like a long time to me. This gives us an extra opportunity for fellowship and to gather as faithful disciples. I hope these services will give us space and time to reflect on what God is doing in our lives and in our world, to worship God, and to faithfully live into who God is calling us to be.

Our scripture passage for this evening is the same scripture passage we'll be discussing on Sunday, so you're getting a sneak preview tonight of what's to come. In this reading, we have two famous parables from Luke's Gospel. One is the parable of the lost sheep, featuring the shepherd who has one hundred sheep, loses one of them, and leaves 99 of them in the wilderness while he searches for the lost sheep. When he finds the lost sheep, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." That is followed by the parable of a woman who has ten silver coins and loses one of them. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches until she finds it. When she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost."

In December of 2016, I went on a solo vacation. My son Jack was only nine years old at the time and the day after Christmas he hopped on a flight to visit his dad for the holidays. Since he would be out of town for over a week, I decided to book a trip for myself to get away for a little while and catch my breath. The timing of our trips worked out really well, as it turns out. I booked a flight for him out of Love Field airport and booked a flight for myself out of Love Field that left a few hours later, so we could both go through security at the same time, and I could make sure he got to his gate and boarded his flight. While we were at the gate, he had his iPad mini with him, and he wanted to know if he could plug in his headphones and watch a movie on it during the flight. I knew he would have to pay for the movie and I wasn't going to be on the flight with him. But I also know that I am raising a smart, responsible kid. So, I wrote down my credit card information on a slip of paper and gave it to him with strict instructions. I told him to use the information to buy the movie, and to make absolutely sure that he put the paper in his backpack when he was done so no one else would see it. He agreed.

All was well until I arrived at my hotel room just outside Big Bend National Park. After I flew to Midland, rented a car and drove to Big Bend, I was pretty tired. I had brought my bags into my hotel room and had just sat down in the chair when my cell phone rang. It surprised me, partly because I had no idea who would be calling me, but mostly because I had no idea I had cell phone service at the hotel. Big Bend is really remote. I definitely didn't have a WiFi signal, which was one of the selling points of the trip, honestly. So, I was shocked when my phone rang. Once I answered it, I was even more shocked at the conversation I ended up having. A very nice woman who was a complete stranger was calling to let me know that she had been on a Southwest Airlines flight that week and had found a slip of paper that she was fairly certain had my credit card number on it. As it turns out, when Jack brought the slip of paper to his seat with

him on the plane, he wrote my phone number on it in case he needed to call me when he landed and forgot my number. That worked in my favor, because the stranger used it to call me and let me know she would shred the paper so no one else would get my credit card information.

Needless to say, I was relieved. I mean, who does that? Who finds a slip of paper with someone's credit card information on it and tracks them down to make sure they know it's safe? I've lost any number of things throughout my life, but this was one of the first times I remember losing something really important and I didn't even realize it until someone else found it for me. When I read today's text Jesus says, "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?" I think to myself, "Um, I don't think most people would do that." I'm not sure that most people would chase after one out of one hundred sheep. And I'm clearly not a professional herder of actual sheep, but I have no idea how you could leave ninety-nine sheep out in the wilderness without losing a good number of them. Who does that? As for the second parable, I completely understand how happy the woman is to find her lost coin – unlike me with my credit card number, at least she knew she'd lost it in the first place. But I have to admit, I did not host a party in the hotel lobby to celebrate my good fortune. I completely understand how happy she was to find her coin, but throwing a found coin party with her friends and neighbors seems pretty over the top, even if it was a really valuable coin.

These parables paint a picture for us. And it's one that we're probably not used to seeing in our everyday lives. When this story begins, the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling about Jesus, complaining about the sort of people he spent time with. They were unhappy that he welcomed sinners and ate with them. And Jesus tells these two parables in response to their complaints. The stories paint a picture for us of who God is. In these stories, we can see clear

depictions of God's love for us. And they're the kind of depictions that might lead us to say, "Wow. Who does that?"

I have spent and continue to spend a lot of time wondering where God is and how God is moving in the world. I read an article about this passage that said, "If Jesus' parables are true, then God doesn't hang out where I assume he does. If Jesus' parables are true, then God isn't in the fold with the ninety-nine insiders. God isn't curled up on her couch polishing the nine coins she's already sure of. *God is where the lost things are.* God is where lostness reigns. God is in the darkness of the wilderness, God is in the remotest corners of the house, God is where the search is at its fiercest. Meaning: if I want to find God, I have to seek the lost. I have to *get lost*. I have to leave the safety of the inside and venture out. I have to recognize my own lostness and consent to be found."¹

On days like today, when I have a million things to do and not nearly enough time to do them, when I have so many distractions that keep vying for my attention, it comforts me to know that God looks for the lost. And when I think about who is lost, that includes me. Church can be a lot of things to a lot of people, but perhaps it can be a place and a community where we can slow down, recognize our lostness, and consent to be found.

¹ Thomas, Debie. "On Lostness." *Journey With Jesus*, 8 Sept. 2019, www.journeywithjesus.net.