

Pastor's Corner – 4-14-2018
Things that are Lost

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables that feature something that was lost. These stories were given in response to a criticism that the Pharisees had about Jesus, namely that he spent an awful lot of time hanging out with “sinners”. He even ate with them - #gasp #howdarehe! The parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son are an explanation to the Pharisees as to why Jesus spent so much time with the kinds of people that the religious leaders intentionally avoided.

In the parable of the lost sheep the shepherd leaves 99 sheep back in the fold to go and find the one sheep that wandered off alone and got lost. Once he finds the lost sheep, the shepherd calls all his friends together for a great celebration. “Rejoice with me,” he says, “I have found my lost sheep!” The shepherd is overjoyed that the sheep is returned to the fold. There was much rejoicing.

The second parable is about a woman who has 10 silver coins and loses one. She lights the lamps, sweeps the house, and searches high and low until she finally finds the coin. Once she finds it she brings in all of her friends and neighbors and says, “Rejoice with me! I have found my lost coin!” There was much rejoicing.

The third parable is about the lost son. We sometimes refer to this one as the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable there is a man with two sons. The younger decides he is fed up with life at home, demands his inheritance and then takes off to a foreign country. There he squanders his inheritance with worldly living. It doesn't take too long before the younger son is broke and destitute, mucking it up with the pigs. As he hits rock bottom he remembers that he has a father back home who treats servants better than he is currently being treated. The son decides to get up and go back home, hoping he can find a place as a slave in his father's house.

As the son approaches home his father races out to meet him. The father embraces his pig-stinky son, gives him clean clothes, reinstates him into the family and throws a great party. “Come and celebrate,” he says, “for my son was lost and now is found.”

Unlike with the first two parables, not everyone is happy that the thing which was lost has been found. The older brother in this parable is positively irate that the father is making such a fuss over this lost and rebellious son. He starts to complain that he has followed all the rules all his life and has never had any parties thrown in his honor. He's mad at his father for the way he has received the wayward son.

The parable ends with the following response to the older son, “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

It is striking to me that the father treats both sons with equal compassion. The older son who is obedient but resentful is assured by the father that he is loved and has an inheritance waiting for him. The younger son who is rebellious and who had previously turned his back on his family is welcomed home with open arms.

These three parables talk about how God views us and how he searches save those who are lost. They also explain why he spent some much time with “sinner” (i.e. those who are lost). When we combine these parables together we see that just about every class of person is represented. The lost sheep represents those who were once a part of the fold but have wandered away, not out of rebellion, but out of inattention. The lost coin represents people in the world who have no idea that they are lost. The lost son represents people who are rebellious and who intentionally and willfully leave God's side. And then there is the older son who represents those of us who come to church, try to do all the right things, and feel like we're never rewarded for our efforts.

No matter who you identify with from these parables one thing is the same for us all. God loves you, he sent his son to find you, and you have a home waiting for you in the new heaven and the new earth. And when you are found, there is much rejoicing!

Have a happy Sabbath,
Pastor Tyler