



Lectionary 24, Year C

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Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries

14th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 15:1-10

Luke 15:1-10

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “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? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

SERMON TEXT:

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

My name is Pastor Dan Forehand, and I serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. I bring you greetings from our Bishop Timothy Graham, the rest of the Synod Staff, and the 169 congregations and 8 campus ministries that make up our territory. Thank you for your collaboration and for joining me in worship today.

I sometimes wonder if devices like Apple AirTags have taken all the fun out of life. Do you remember the days when you would check your bags at the airport, hop on the plane, connect in Atlanta or Chicago, hop on another plane land at your destination and watch the bags come down the conveyor belt wondering if the miracle happened and your bag made it? Now, I can know before my plane takes off whether I should bolt to the luggage desk and file a complaint. The adventure of baggage intrigue is gone.

Or those days when you would scramble around getting lunches ready and bags packed for everybody. Making sure the kids have matching shoes and loading them in the car, ready to go, when, "Oh no! My keys! Where are they?" And then you all scramble back into the house and see who can find the car keys so you aren't any later. Now I just turn on my phone and it tells me where my keys are. The adventure of key exploration is gone, too.

You know sometimes we like to make Gospel stories more complicated than they really are. And sometimes they are full of nuance and it's important to dig deep to see what tidbits that we can find from it, but this reading is not one of those. It's also one that many of us know well.

This parable that Jesus tells the grumbling Pharisees and scribes is classic. "Who among you," asks Jesus, "having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not go after the lost sheep and rejoice when the sheep has been found?" Or, "a woman had ten coins, lost one of them, lights a lamp and searches carefully until she finds it. Then she calls her neighbors together and says, 'Let's celebrate, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'"

Jesus loves you. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves the whole world and what Jesus wants more than anything else is for us to know that, to experience that, to believe that, and to be transformed by that. And this is a story all about how much Jesus loves us. This is a story all about how Jesus will do whatever it takes - even dying on a cross and rising from a tomb - to make that love be real for you and me and everybody.

And here's another interesting bit to the story, Jesus knows us, too. Jesus knows that we can be walking along in the wilderness and suddenly become distracted by all sorts of things - wealth, power, politics - you name it. And we venture off down this road or that one looking for yummier and more attractive things to eat, we can quickly get lost from our Shepherd. It's entirely possible that the road we choose to go down is a good one - it's full of working for justice, bringing peace to the world, and working really hard. There's nothing wrong with that and sometimes we

find ourselves, though, forgetting about Jesus as we do those things.

And Jesus doesn't come back yelling at us, embarrassing us, or making us feel shame. Jesus does not need an AirTag or some other device to find us. Jesus never doubts that we will be found. And, in my faithful imagination, Jesus has known the whole time exactly where we are, and has never really left us even though it might seem that way.

To be known and loved by God is a powerful and transformative thing. And, it's a work of joy. **Joy** - this incredibly powerful word that appears twice in our reading today.

Joy is communal. **Joy** gives life. **Joy** does miracles. **Joy** offers a more powerful connection to the story that is unfolding all around us. **Joy** is a gift.

And joy is the gift that is found through Jesus knowing and loving us. Being the 99 and sharing joy with the one who is back. Being the 9 and sharing joy with the one who has been found. In a world where we choose more and more to divide ourselves, to find things to disagree with, to complain about things being less than perfect, we begin to sound a lot like the grumbling Pharisees and the scribes at the beginning of this reading.

But Jesus comes into our midst with joy. What might that look like for our communities of faith, if we shared that same joy that Jesus has for each and every one of us? How might that change our conversations about mission, ministry, budgets, and what we do throughout the week as the Church?

Maybe as I watched the luggage go around and around the carousel, wondering when or if my bag would come, I had a curious joy building inside of me. Maybe as my family searched the house for the keys, only to find them in the pants that I wore yesterday, we were all just waiting for that moment for a joyful celebration where we could laugh at how silly daddy is and celebrate that it has been found. Maybe it's always been all about joy.

And maybe the best joy that we can find is the joy that comes from being loved by our Creating God. Being loved by our Savior Jesus. Being loved by the Spirit who accompanies us with joy.

So, friends, there is a lot in the world these days that does not bring joy. And there is a lot of important work for us to do as the Church. I get that and I hope that you find ways to feed the hungry, care for those who are on the margins of society, and stand up for justice for all people. That's holy, beautiful, powerful work.

But I also hope that you can make way for joy. Because Jesus has found us. Because Jesus does love us. Because Jesus knows us. And, even as Jesus knows us in our complexities and failures, Jesus still comes with joy!

So friends, may be adventure together with curiosity and joy. Celebrating that we have been found and loved by Jesus. Celebrating that this gift of joy is for everyone. Rejoicing along with Jesus and the angels that the lost has been found and that we can share that Good News of Jesus with the world.

May you go with Joy! May you go with Jesus! And may you know that Jesus goes with you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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