



“Every One Counts”

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Scripture:

Luke 15:1-10 (NRSV)

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’

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

The Parable of the Lost Coin

‘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? 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.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

The Sermon:

It takes just one.

One slap.

One insult.

One name called.

One betrayal.

It can wound your spirit.

It can hurt man, woman, or child.

A great many slaps, insults, and betrayals can crush a human spirit, make one fearful, despairing, angry, violent. You lose your sense of self and worth, your voice is not heard.

It is oppression. Oppression of the human being; body and soul. Jesus faces it over and over and over in his journeying through Israel and Judah.

The rabbis in Jesus' day, I have read, made lists and one was a list of despised and unclean jobs; the tax collectors, sailors, camel drivers...and shepherds.

Jesus is eating with the one, and his first little parable highlights the diligent searching of the other.

There is nothing particularly wrong with the woman in the second parable, except that she is poor. A drachma is worth about a day's wages and she had 10; hardly a savings account for retirement! But it was all she had, and to her it was urgent to find that one coin.

- Is it then the urgency and diligence, of this shepherd and this woman, that Jesus draws to our attention?

The shepherd leaves the other sheep to seek the lost one and returns with it on his shoulders, rejoicing over it. The poor woman, in her humble house with only walls, and ceiling and door, no windows to shed light on her search; she has to light a lamp to see, and then sweeps her dirt floor carefully to find her precious coin.

- Does Jesus want to draw attention to their despised condition: shepherd, poor woman?

I think so.

Yes. Maybe. Perhaps. Parables are tricky with possibility.

But right now, even more, ***there is another message in these stories; the message of rejoicing.***

The shepherd rejoices over a single sheep.

The woman calls her women friends, who live nearby, to celebrate with her after finding her one coin.

And Jesus declares, heaven is filled with rejoicing, too.

A sheep and a coin cannot be judged, cannot repent. I don't think that is the point for you and me today.

The point is ***the rejoicing***... God's heaven filled with laughter and joy, over every single one.

Jesus tells the religious leaders, the upright, the self-righteous, the entitled ones; the ones who slap and judge and humiliate, the ones who strip away love and hope and honor from another... telling them all that God rejoices over ***every single one***.

Especially, like the shepherd and the woman, the single lost sheep, the small, not very valuable coin.

With God, through Jesus, we learn: every one of us counts.

The love and mercy of God is for every last one of us.

We learn, that the heavens rejoice in us. The oppression of body and spirit is nothing compared to the love of God for us.

- Every single creature receives the attention and the care that the shepherd offers.
- Every single part of creation receives the diligent seeking of the poor woman.
- And every part of creation rejoices when we find ourselves held in God's hands like a treasured coin, wrapped across God's shoulders like a sheep that has been found.

You know that I treasure the stories and parables of Jesus.

You know that I want you to read them, ponder them, and find meaning and joy in them; whether you hear them as I hear them, or differently. You know this, right?

Then you will want to know that the parable of the prodigal son, the waiting father, and the resentful brother is the next story in Luke's gospel. It is at the dead center of the gospel, and that might be significant. It might be very important.

Because it is important to find yourself, in the gospel and in the parable...silly selfish son; loving waiting parent; resentful, obedient older son?

Perhaps you are far from home and lost; perhaps you are a wounded parent still loving a child that is lost to you; perhaps you are a burdened and angry adult like the elder brother?

The parable will not give you one moral, cannot be a story in one perspective...it is stories inside of story.

But today, in this moment...I want you to share this.

The story includes homecoming.

This story ***culminates in celebration.***

No matter how the rest of life has slapped you, silenced you, oppressed you.

This story ***culminates in the love of the parent for both children, and in the parent's joy...for each and every child.***

That includes you, and that includes me.

Praise God, for such a God!

Amen.