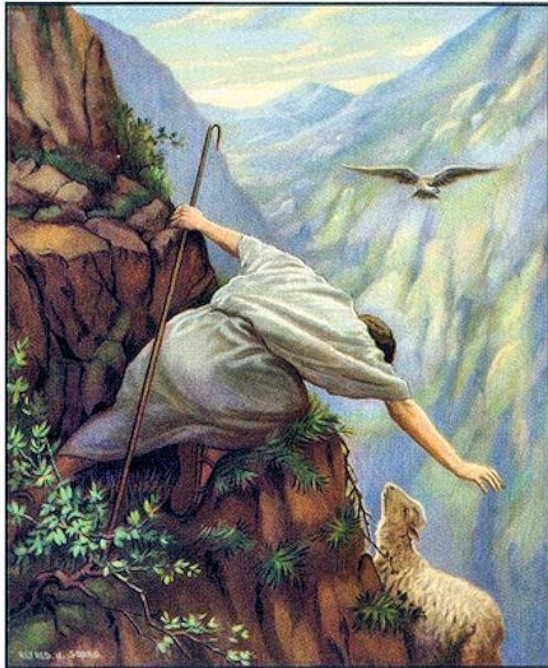


A Sermon entitled Everything [in] Between – Lost & Found
From the text: Luke 15:1-10
Plymouth Presbyterian Church
St. Helens, Oregon
Rev Peter J. Blank
March 30, 2025

MESSAGE Everything [in] Between – Lost & Found

This is one of my favorites: the parable of the lost sheep. It's the lead story in Luke 15, a chapter devoted entirely to things that are lost being found: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and then, in the grand finale, a lost son—the prodigal. A whole chapter devoted to lost-ness!



[PAINTING OF THE LOST SHEEP BY ALFORD SOORD]

It would be tempting to read these stories, especially the one about the sheep, and walk away thinking, "We who were lost but now are found should devote our lives to going out and saving the lost." That sounds noble. It sounds right. But I don't think that's what Jesus is getting at.

A while back, I was heading to visit someone in the hospital, and let's just say I urgently needed to use the restroom. I found the nearest one, got in there, and just as I was settling in, I noticed a wad of paper jammed near the pipes at eye level. It was a religious tract. In bold print, it asked: "Are You Lost?"

NO! I'm exactly where I need to be. I'd been thinking about this moment for the last ten minutes! I am NOT lost!

I understood the intent of the person who left this tract. A lot of us have been shaped to see the world in binary fashion: the saved and the lost. And naturally, we believe our role as the found is to save the lost.

But that's not our role. In fact, I think it's dangerous to think that way.

Luke sets the stage for this parable by saying, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

There it is: division. The religious folks had drawn the lines. "Us and them." "Clean and unclean." "Found and lost."

And we do it too. We've been trained—religiously trained—to divide. We divide by denomination, by doctrine, by worship style. Ever driven through a town where every corner has a different kind of church? First Bible Church. God's Word Bible Church. True Believers Bible Church. True Believers That Believe the Bible Church. One word change, and boom—a new church. A new division.

We even divide over who we think deserves to be in our church. What would happen if *those people* came here? You know who I mean—whoever it is in your mind right now.

And that's where Jesus starts. He's not preaching to the sinners in this moment. He's responding to the religious people muttering under their breath.

And so, Jesus tells a story: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Now, let's be real. We're not shepherds. Most of us have never been closer to a shepherd than the Christmas pageant when we wore a bathrobe and carried a staff. But even we know this is nuts.

You've got 100 sheep. One goes missing, do you leave 99 vulnerable in the wilderness to find the one? That's not good business. That's not safe. That's not logical.

Let me put it in youth group terms: you've got 100 junior high kids on a trip to Times Square, and one goes missing. Do you leave the 99 in the middle of Manhattan to find the one? I don't think so. I remember the moment I realized I was too old to lead youth group—I fell asleep at a church lock-in. Ninety-nine junior high kids on the loose while I napped. They had a squirt gun fight in the sanctuary! It was a nightmare. [NOTE: My answer to the Board of that church is still "I had a short nap!"]

So, when Jesus asks, "Would you leave the ninety-nine and go after the one?" the crowd listening probably laughed. Survey says, "No, Jesus. No shepherd in his right mind would do that!"

But that's the point. Jesus tells a story that doesn't make sense to us because God doesn't make sense to us. "My ways are not your ways..." (Isaiah 55:8-9)

- God's logic is grace.
- God's math doesn't add up.
- God risks everything for one.

And that puts us face-to-face with ourselves.

Because we live in a world that writes off the one. One person, one group, one culture—the one is expendable for the sake of the many. We divide to conquer, to control, to deport, to keep ourselves feeling secure and superior.

But Jesus tells this parable to confront that kind of thinking. He's saying: in God's kingdom, no one is expendable. Not one.

And here's where it gets personal. At the end of the story, there's rejoicing over the one who was found—more than over the ninety-nine who didn't need to be found.

Which begs the question: who's really lost in this story?

Is it the tax collectors and sinners who are sitting at Jesus' feet?

Is it the religious folks standing outside, grumbling about who's in and who's out?

This parable isn't about evangelistic strategy. It's about heart transformation. It's a call to stop dividing people into found and lost, worthy and unworthy. It's a call to see others—and ourselves—through the eyes of a God who doesn't cut losses, but searches until the one is found. So, where do you find yourself in this story? Are you the lost sheep? Are you the muttering Pharisee? Are you part of the ninety-nine?

Do you see yourself in need of a heart transformation: are you ready to see the world with the heart of the shepherd—where no one is expendable, and everyone matters?

Because in the end, it's not about who's lost. It's about who's willing to rejoice when grace finds someone who was lost.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**We believe in a seeking God,
a with-us and before-us God,
a chasing-after-us God.**

**We believe that no matter where we wander
or what mountains we climb, this God—**

**the God who walked the streets of Jerusalem,
who shook hands with lepers,**

**who patted children on the head,
and who told stories of love—
is always close at hand.**

**So on the good days and the hard days,
on the mountains and in the valleys,
we believe that we are always being found.
Thanks be to God for a love like that.
Amen.**