

**III TRINITY 2018**  
**SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**I PETER 5.5-11 St. LUKE 15.1-7**

✠

Today's Gospel banner headline...*"Jesus hangs out with the wrong crowd"*...and the respectable religious leaders start grumbling.

Jesus often attracted large crowds by his teaching...included in the crowds were people some considered to be social and religious outcasts...they were born on the wrong side of the tracks...they were told, "Sorry...you're not welcome here."

It would have been easy for Jesus to have said to the self-righteous types, "Awe, quit you're grumbling." Instead, he employs a tactic he often uses to make his point...he tells a story...using images from everyday life.

The Story of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are two parts of a trilogy...the third part, the Story of the Lost Son...is the Gospel for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity. All three parts of the story have the same message...God in his awesome, unwavering love goes out looking for those who are lost...and rejoices in finding them and rescuing them from evil.

The "respectable" religious types in today's Gospel believed God was ready to forgive people who were truly sorry for the bad things they had said or done...but the thought he went out looking for people they despised and hated because of who they were...never occurred to them. Jesus was presenting a new and radical teaching about love, compassion and forgiveness.

Jesus' stories (parables) come from everyday life. Sheep were an important commodity...and still are. A true shepherd loves his sheep and takes care of them. He will do everything in his power to find the one that wanders off before something happens to it, and brings it back to the safety of the flock.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who comes looking for us when we go wandering off and have trouble finding our way out of the messes we sometimes create in our lives. He is happy and his heart is full of joy when he finds us and leads us back home...like the shepherd in the story.

The silver coins in the story were also valuable...they may represent the woman's life savings or an inheritance. It is possible she was a widow. 401K and IRA plans didn't exist. A silver coin was a day's wages...a lot of money to lose. She had every reason to celebrate finding the lost silver coin.

We should not think the ninety-nine sheep that didn't wander off and get lost or the nine coins that were safe and secure are allegories for people who are so righteous they don't need to be saved.

The two stories and that of the lost son are meant to teach us about humility...the opposite of arrogant self-righteousness. Even those of us who attend Mass regularly and do all we can to live according to God's plan...can get caught in the trap of thinking we are better than everyone else. God knows what's in our hearts and is happy when we stop thinking and doing bad things and turn our lives around.

Jesus shows us through his own acts of humility God's infinite capacity to forgive and welcome home those who ask, regardless of who they are, wherever they live, or whether they are rich or poor. Respectable people in God's eyes are those who admit they are not respectable.

Humility leads us to become the kind of people God wants us to be...full of compassion and mercy and love toward others. Peter tells us we should all be subject to each other. He does not mean blind submission; he means opening our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, knowing it is God's grace that helps to be truly humble and act for the good of others.

God keeps company with the people he loves...you and me...sinner and saint...IRS agent and priest...politician and teacher... And Jesus shows us just how far God will reach to bring us back into his company when we get lost...and the joy he has when we return. No one...is excluded from God's love because of who they are.

And in heaven...the Angels of God rejoice over any one who repents and comes home to God...safe and secure...and no longer lost.

✠