

III Trinity 2020
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
1 Peter 5.5-11 St. Luke 15.1-10



It's Sunday morning. Dad can't find his wallet...Mother can't find the car keys...little brother can't find a shoe...big sister can't find her cell phone. After some searching everyone finds the missing items. There is a collective sigh of relief...everything is complete...it's time to go to Mass.

Most of us misplace things from time to time. Lose the shopping list...it's easy enough to make a new one. Lose the Driver's License...it's not so easy to replace without a trip to the DMV. Finding the Driver's License while on the way there...that might be a good reason to call a friend and celebrate.

The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are two parts of a trilogy that includes the Parable of the Lost Son. They are "Once Upon a Time" stories about something valuable that is lost and then is found. Jesus didn't invent parables...but he uses them to convey a moral or spiritual lesson.

Sheep were an important commodity in Jesus' time and still are today. The people who heard the Parable of the Lost Sheep would have understood why the farmer went looking for the one lost sheep. He didn't leave the 99 sheep because he didn't care for them. He loves all of his sheep and when he finds the lost sheep carries it home on his shoulders...to the safety and security of the sheep pen. His flock is whole and complete again. It's time to celebrate.

In the Parable of the Lost Coin, Jesus asks us to consider what a woman who has 10 silver coins would do if she loses one of the coins. A silver coin was a day's wage. Jesus doesn't give us any information about the woman; she may have been a widow...the money could have been her life's savings. When she finds the missing coin...everything is whole and complete again. It's time to celebrate.

Jesus' parables are simple stories in which he uses images from real life to make a deeper point. The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are ultimately about God's infinite power to fix what is broken...to restore order from chaos...to forgive with compassion and love...to bring back those who get lost.

Both of the parables end with Jesus saying there will be happiness in heaven when those who get lost are found again. This will become much clearer in the Parable of the Lost Son, which we will read later in the summer.

The radical element in both parables is the idea God begins the process of restoration and forgiveness by actively seeking those who are lost...he doesn't wait for us to come to him. This was good news for the tax collectors and others who were a large part of Jesus' audience. There is hope even for those who were considered hopeless.

But the religious leaders found Jesus' teaching disturbing. It lessened their control over the people and who they thought was worthy of God's attention. They believed God welcomed repentant sinners...they had a hard time with the idea God actively searched for those who hadn't yet repented...so he could bring them back to the safety of the sheep pen...and celebrate!

Sheep, as we know, don't really watch out for each other. Our friend Saint Peter tells us because Jesus is our Chief Shepherd, we should be the kind of sheep who care for each other in the same way he cares for us. He tells us to wear humility like a coat and do what's best for each other. Peter tells us God does not like arrogant or self-righteous behavior. But when we show humility God "will lift us up in his own good time...and to leave all our worries with him...because he cares for us."

Peter also tells us to be alert and watchful at all times. The Devil is roaming around like a roaring lion looking for sheep he can pounce on and devour. Our sheep faith has to be strong and grounded in order to resist his attacks. Our faith in Jesus gives us the tools we need to remain firm, strong, sure and safe.

Sometimes we lose our way. We don't have to stay lost. Jesus helps us find our way back home to wholeness and completeness. And there is the story of the boy who got lost and found his way home. But that's for another time.

God is happy when we get home. "Then the angels in heaven will have a big celebration... and we're invited."

