

Those Lost Sheep



Talk about a familiar Parable—everyone has heard the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Children’s books tell of it, pictures have been painted of it, and stained-glass windows in church proclaim it. The Parable of the Lost Coin will not be so familiar, but it tells the same basic story.

The theme is clear: God searches for the Lost. God keeps on searching until He finds the Lost. God is not interested in judging but in Finding. Simple and clear, right? No, there’s more.

We know the Parable of the Lost Sheep so well that we miss some of the interesting details—and it is those details that we are going to share this morning.

First, Jesus is telling the parable of the Lost Sheep to a group of Pharisees. These people are defenders of the Law—and spend their time judging others who are not keeping the Law. They assume that God is like them—a watch bird watching everyone to be sure that no one is sinning.

But Jesus has another view of God, and so tells them the Parable of the Lost Sheep. “Which one of you” Jesus asks: “would leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness, and go after the one Lost Sheep?” Well, the honest answer is—no one. You think you would, but you wouldn’t—like any good bookkeeper you would not want to endanger the 99 just for the sake of one sheep that had got lost of its own carelessness. Note that Jesus says the 99 other sheep are left in the wilderness—exposed and unprotected—while the shepherd searches for the one lost sheep. Not very sensible, if you ask me.

But Jesus is saying that GOD would—God is so concerned about the Lost person that he abandons everything He is doing to search for and find the Lost. That is what God is like, Jesus is saying.

Now, if we look more closely at the Sheep, we begin to see that Jesus seems all of mankind like those sheep. In fact, the only difference between those sheep is that the 99 are humanity as we think we are, and the one sheep is humanity as we really are. The 99 sheep think they are all right, but they are in the wilderness, exposed, in danger, trying to exist on their own. The one sheep knows it is in danger, knows it needs help, and knows it needs a saviour. God cannot do anything about the 99—they think they are just fine, and don’t want to be saved—but God can do something about the one Lost sheep because He knows the sheep wants to be saved. God can’t do anything with the person who walks by the Church, who believes he is perfectly fine, and simply has no use for

God. But God can and will search for the person who knows he needs God and wants to be rescued. That's the kind of God we have, and the kind of people we are.

And when the shepherd has found the Lost Sheep, he puts it on his shoulder and carries it home and says: Rejoice with me, because I have found the one who was Lost.

Wow. No condemnation, no discipline, no rebuke—when God finds us, He puts us on His shoulder, and carried us home, rejoicing.

Note, the shepherd doesn't carry the Lost sheep back to the sheep fold, which is what you might expect, and what any normal shepherd would do. Absolutely not. He carries the sheep HOME. Just as God does to us. God puts us on His shoulders and carries us HOME. We who have been lost and are now found are carried by God to His Home. He carries us Home REJOICING, because we have started a new relationship with God, as part of His family. We belong, and our Baptism proclaims that we belong. From God's point of view, we have started a new relationship with Him, a personal as well as corporate relationship, which will end with us becoming the Saints in Heaven. He intended us to become from the very beginning.

Let me end by telling you a story, a true one, one that I know personally:

A certain woman of about 40 was in the hospital dying from cancer. For 5 years, her Christian friend had been witnessing about Jesus Christ to her, without any seeming effect. The woman in the hospital had proclaimed that she was an atheist, had no use for God or the Church. But thanks be to God, she was still interested in what her friend told her—so much so that one day she said to her friend, "I would like to meet this Father Ron that you talk so much about."

And so, I was invited to the hospital to see this woman, and after listening to her for a few minutes, asked her if she would consider asking Jesus to be her Saviour, to begin a new life with God. She said she would; and I was privileged to help her come to Christ and accept Him as Saviour and Lord. I then anointed her with the Sacrament of Holy Unction for Healing. Before I left, I gave her a copy of the Gospel of St. Luke, in large print, that she could read more easily. The next day I visited her again in the hospital, and during the conversation, asked her what part of the Gospel of St. Luke she had liked the best. "That's easy," she said, "The Story of the 'Lost Sheep' because that Lost Sheep is me." There were tears in both our eyes as I gave her a Final Blessing.

The next day she died—and I have no doubt, was carried Home on the Shoulders of the Good Shepherd. My brothers and sisters, God had searched for that one Lost Sheep—and found her. And He can find you too. Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.