



Preach **Luke** notes

Proper 19 Year C
16th September 2007

RELATED

Exodus 32:7-14
Psalm 51:1-11

CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28
Psalm 14
1 Tim 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10 (NIV) **The lost sheep and the lost coin**

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent'.

'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

What is the Kingdom of God like?

There isn't one of us who hasn't lost something at some time or other, and most of us will know the anxiety, frustration and deep disappointment of losing something precious, even something vital to our lives. We will also know the relief and joy that is felt when that which was lost is found. We may know too the long process of coming to terms with a loss that will never be replaced. Jesus as with so many of his parables and stories uses subject matter to which we can all relate. He helps us get a glimpse of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like; and what, very importantly, God is like.

The two stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin share the same punch lines, the joy that is felt in heaven when a sinner repents. These are but brief glimpses into heavenly places, but there in heaven it seems sinners who repent are received with great celebrations. That is good news indeed for all of us. It certainly is for me, heaven from the looks of it is somewhere where I want to be. I want to be in on the party. At the time of Jesus people believed that God's creation was in two halves, earth and heaven. These two halves were supposed to fit together and be in harmony with each other. If you discovered what was going on in heaven, then you would know what things were supposed to be like on earth too. But it was precisely Jesus' inclination to mix with tax collectors and sinners that had landed him in trouble with the

establishment. It was in response to the criticism he received that he told these parables. For his critics, the scribes and Pharisees, the closest you could get to heaven was the Temple. Temple worship required very high levels of purity from the priests, and purity meant keeping a host of laws many of which precluded the observer from having anything to do with common folk, and especially with tax collectors.ⁱ

What about God? God of course is the shepherd in the first story. Shepherds were numbered among the unclean and sinners, for they could not observe all the strict washing laws that were part of the “pure life,” so venerated by the Pharisees. To the Pharisees shepherds were “people of the land” and there was a complete barrier between them. A Pharisee was forbidden to fraternise socially with such common people; indeed they were supposed to have no business dealings with men of the land either. Aside from that the life of a shepherd was a lonely one and could be dangerous. The sheep grazed on the bleak rocky central plateau lands. Predators were always a threat and could be four legged or two. The sheep grazed free range and could easily stray down rocky gullies or ravines. The shepherd would have to be constantly vigilant. The sheep were kept for their wool and so unlike our sheep today lived relatively long lives. The shepherd knew them all intimately and the bond between him and his flocks was strong. Shepherds often looked after the communal flocks of the village. A shepherd did not drive his sheep to pasture but led them, and they followed. If a shepherd lost a sheep he would be

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expected to search for it and if it were killed had to bring its fleece back as proof of its demise.ⁱⁱ

The shepherd in this parable, according to Brian Morris, former stewardship director of Gloucester Diocese, was a somewhat reckless fellow who was prepared to leave the ninety nine for the sake of the one who went astray.ⁱⁱⁱ And so we have this picture of God. God loves us all. He loves the Pharisee, good and pure, and the man of the land, an ordinary sinner, and indeed even the extraordinary sinner. God is concerned for us all and when we go astray actively seeks us out, even to the extent of being reckless in doing so, if we are to follow Brian Morris’s argument. Should we repent he rejoices greatly. Paul saw himself as an extraordinary sinner, a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence who was sought out by God (1 Timothy 1:12-17). God it could be argued was reckless in that when Paul was taken in by Ananias and ministered to, Christians could have been at risk. Certainly Ananias was concerned about Paul and the safety of his fellow Christians (Acts 9:13-15).

Sheep and shepherds are very common metaphors in both the Old and New Testament. Coins are less common. In this second story the Palestinian woman was, it is suggested, poor. Peasant’s houses were dark. Windows were few. The floor was beaten earth, probably covered in dried reeds or rushes, or dried grass. The coin would have been small and not easy to find. She lights a lamp and sweeps eager to find the coin. It may have been a matter of necessity. The coin was needed to buy food. It may have been a more sentimental reason. Palestinian women linked ten silver coins together on a chain and stitched them to their headdress. They were rather like a wedding ring, symbolic of marriage.^{iv} She was very anxious to have the full set back, and when she finds the missing coin



she is overjoyed and calls together her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. God is like this woman, says Jesus, over a repentant sinner.

Luke 15.1 – 10 and Stewardship

For many people Amazing Grace is considered a particularly poignant hymn in that it expresses the great gratitude of an undoubted sinner, for being found when he was lost. John Newton the repentant slave trader was following in the footsteps of St. Paul as were St. Augustine, and St Francis, to name but a three of the many who have repented their former lives and accepted God's grace. When these sinners repented they decided to change their lives and change them dramatically. They severed their allegiances to their old ways and accepted a new ruler, and it was this new ruler who was to turn their lives upside down.

When we the lost sheep and the lost coins in Jesus' parables repent and become followers of Jesus, we in effect come under a new ruler. No longer are we in allegiance to the world and its values, we have a completely new mind set as it were.

One wonders how modern man in our culture would act being confronted with loss such as experienced by the shepherd and the poor woman. The words compensation and claim immediately spring to mind. As Christians we are no longer the self-centred, self-serving go getters of the modern age, ready to wring all we can out of life and the world for our own satisfaction. We are no longer the "get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the can,"^v brigade, instead we become stewards of God's gifts to us, concerned to do the best for him.

The Kingdom of heaven, it is very clear from scripture, is seen as a place and time beyond the grave. The time stretches for eternity (John 14:1-4, 3:16). There is however another dimension to the Kingdom of God, the here and now, the Kingdom of God within our hearts, within our churches and within our communities (Ephesians 2:19-22). What does it mean to be a steward building that kingdom? Rick Warren author of the Purpose driven Life and the Purpose driven Church looking at the nature of Christian Communities argues that as Christians investing in our churches and communities we are not only investing in God's Kingdom here on earth but also for eternity.^{vi} In order to make our Churches effective as the Kingdom of God on earth we have to understand what stewardship is all about and make it purposeful. We have to look at our time, our abilities, our possessions and our money, indeed our whole lives and put them at the behest of God.^{vii}

Harvest time is a time of rejoicing. Henri Nouwen in talking on Fundraising and Spirituality asserts that as Christians we have a vision that is so exciting that we need to give others the opportunity to participate in that vision. By doing so, he argues, they won't become poorer, but they will become richer by giving.^{viii} At harvest time the farmer gathers in what he has grown. What he has grown will certainly depend in large part on what he has sown. St. Paul teaches us "He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully." Paul tells us "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:5-8). We as the sheep that have been found, as the coin that has been returned to its rightful place, need in our gratitude to give back to God. We as the hands of Jesus here on earth, building his Kingdom both in our hearts, and here and now in our families and our communities, we need to sow well that we may



harvest greatly, and then we can rejoice gratefully, for we will be richer for so doing.

God the good shepherd out of his great love for us gave us his son to die on the cross. God the good shepherd and seeking woman has searched us out and brought us here to respond to his love, and in our love for him to grow his Kingdom in this place.

Additional Ideas for All Age Service

Have a game of seeking & finding with either pictures/models of sheep or pictures / real coins hidden around the church building. Anyone can join in!

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ⁱ Luke for Everyone, Tom Wright p184

ⁱⁱ The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay p206-07

ⁱⁱⁱ Stewardship for Sundays, Chichester Diocese website Sunday Sermon ideas from the lectionary <http://natstew.diochi.org.uk/>

^{iv} The Gospel of Luke, William Barclay p209

^v Harvest Thanksgiving Stewardship for Sundays Chichester Diocese Web site <http://natstew.diochi.org.uk/>

^{vi} A purpose driven plan Rick Warren Stewardship for Sundays Chichester Diocese Web site <http://natstew.diochi.org.uk/>

^{vii} The Diocese of Winchester Christian Stewardship. What is Christian Stewardship? <http://.winchester.anglican.org/cswhatis.htm>

^{viii} Spirituality of Fundraising A conversation with Henri Nouwen Stewardship for Sundays Chichester Diocese Web site <http://natstew.diochi.org.uk/>

