

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Sheep, Coins, and Sinners

Lesson: Luke 15:1-10 NRSV *15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

My family went to S. Korea on Monday. And people asked me if I feel lonely at home alone. Now I feel the preciousness of my wife rather than loneliness.

There is a saying in philosophy that humans perceive presence through absence. Simply put, when we lose something, we value it. For example, people often do not know the value of youth when they are young. However, they feel the preciousness of youth when they are old. People often do not realize the value of health when they are healthy. However, when they are sick, they realize the value of being healthy. The same goes for family. Parents tend to think their children will live in the same house for the rest of their lives, but as their children grow up, graduate from school, become adults, meet their mates, and get married, they are separated from their parents. What about spouses? After spending a long time together, we often forget how precious spouses are.

In my case, I stumbled upon my wife in the summer of 2016 at a small coffee shop on the seminary campus. At the time, I was a seminary student. And, she was exhibiting her artwork in the coffee shop. We've been close ever since, dating for about a year and a half, and we got married in January 2018. And four days after the wedding we came to California. Since then, we stayed together until my family went to Korea this time.

So, I think I looked forward to having some time just for myself. I was a little bit excited to think about getting enough sleep and cleaning the house and being free from parenting for about 6 weeks and having time for myself. I was a little bit sad that I can't see Evan grow up for about six weeks though.

Over the past week, my wife worked hard to finish packing. And we headed to the hotel near the airport after the church. Contrary to what I expected, I was a little bit depressed while we were in the hotel, whenever I thought about having to be away from them for a while. In order not to miss the flight the next morning, we woke up early, and left the hotel. Then we took the hotel shuttle to the airport. We checked in safely, left our luggage, and went to security. I prayed for them there and I said goodbye to them.

From that moment on, I felt very strange. Without them, everything felt unfamiliar to me. I went back to the hotel because I had left my car there. It was a hotel where we stayed the day before they left, but I felt very strange as I was alone in the parking lot without them. I sat in my car and waited for her text message that they would take off soon. Before that, I never knew her messages would be so precious to me. After receiving her last message, I headed for the Korean clergy gathering in Grantsburg. While driving, I listened to the music we used to listen to. Those songs weren't sad songs, but I was really sad while listening to them.

I safely went to the meeting place and had lunch with them, had endless conversations with them, and had dinner too. Even while I was with them, my heart was sad and not comfortable. My heart was like an inflated balloon, and if someone pokes a little with a needle, I felt like I was going to cry. And I was a little afraid to go back to my empty home with all the lights out. After the meeting, I felt the road home from Grantsburg was too long.

It was Clear Lake that I feel familiar with, but everything felt unfamiliar to me as I was alone. I parked in the garage and entered the dark house with the door open. When I turned on the light in the kitchen, I saw Esther's slippers on the kitchen floor. And I came into the living room with her slippers, and the tears that I had been holding back all day came pouring down. I felt her preciousness after she left and I wrote her a three-page letter. For this reason, it seems like philosophy says humans perceive presence through absence.

Luke 15:1-10 is about lost and found. As Jesus ate at one table with tax collectors and sinners, he told them three parables: "The lost sheep," "The lost coin," and

“The lost son.” Due to my family’s absence, today’s gospel lesson touched my heart even more.

The three parables have something in common. It is about losing something precious and finding it again. The parables show the loss, the effort to find, and the great joy in finding what is lost. And, the shepherd and the woman, and the father of the prodigal son gave a banquet.

Let’s see the first parable of the lost sheep. Verse 4 says: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”

It is difficult for us to understand the parable of the lost sheep. Out of 100 sheep, only one sheep was lost. A normal person might not look for that one lost sheep in order to save the majority of 99. But the shepherd pays attention to the only one. The other 99 sheep are left unattended as the shepherd focuses on finding the lost sheep. Of course, that one sheep will thank the shepherd, but the other 99 may feel uncomfortable.

However, the shepherd loves all his other 99 sheep just as he loves the lost sheep. And the shepherd was able to focus on finding the lost sheep because he believed that God would protect his other sheep. It is a wrong idea to sacrifice one sheep to save 99 sheep. Because if he can't keep one sheep, he can't keep the other 99 sheep. God protects 99 sheep for the shepherd who concentrates on the one lost sheep.

Jesus spoke this parable to the tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and the scribes who snickered and taunted them without being seated at the table. When the tax collectors and sinners heard the parable, they would embrace this parable as their story because they were the lost sheep and needed God’s guidance and salvation.

However, the Pharisees and scribes wouldn’t embrace the parable as their story because they were mainstream and the majority and belonged to the 99 sheep. They believed themselves to be righteous and that they were saved by following the law. Thus, they didn’t need the salvation Jesus gave. But we know that salvation is far from those who call themselves righteous.

The parable of the lost sheep may not strike us deeply due to cultural differences. So, Jesus begins the second parable. It is the story of the lost coin.

In the time of Jesus, there was no electricity in the house, so it was very dark, and the floor was dry mud, so if people dropped something like a coin on the floor, it was difficult to find.

Verse 8 says: “What woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” The woman who lost the coin lit a lamp even during the day and swept the floor with a broom.

Jesus’ parable focuses on losing something. People who realize they have lost something try to find it. The shepherd went from place to place to find his lost sheep, and the woman swept and swept her floor until she found the coin. But when the shepherd has found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulder and rejoices. And She has found the coin, she calls her friends and neighbors for a banquet, rejoicing.

The lost sheep and the lost coin mean sinners. God searches for the lost things with a longing heart, and when he finally finds them, he is very happy. God waits for those who are far from Him, like the shepherd and the woman, and He wants them to return to Him.

Verses 6 and 9 are God’s joy when God sees when sinners return to God. Let’s read them together: “⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’”⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’”

The shepherd and the woman would have paid more for the feast than the sheep and the coin they had recovered. However, God does not count profit or loss, because it is for sinners to repent of their sins and return to God.

Let’s read verses 7 and 10 together: “⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

After hearing Jesus' parable, the tax collectors and sinners who repented of their sins and believed in God were saved. However, the Pharisees and scribes who consider themselves righteous still have not returned to God.

Siblings in Christ, God wants all people in this world to believe in God, believe in Jesus Christ, and be saved. And he is still waiting for those who have not returned to God. The kingdom of God is open to everyone.

I hope that during the coming week all of us will have time to reflect on our past lives and have time to repent. I hope all of us will honestly pray for forgiveness of sins. God wants to hear our prayers. I pray in the name of the Lord that God will restore our lives and give us amazing joy. Amen.