

"Lost to Be Found Again"  
C Pentecost 15; Luke 15:1-10  
September 22, 2019; 10:00 am  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Start of Worship: Have you ever been lost? Have you ever been found again? (Read Scripture—The Message)

**15** <sup>1-3</sup> By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story.

**4-7** "Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, 'Celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' Count on it—there's more joy in heaven over one sinner's rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

**8-10** "Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she'll call her friends and neighbors: 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God."

## **HAVE YOU EVER BEEN LOST?**

So, as we began our worship time today, I posed the question:

Have you ever been lost?  
Have you ever been found again?

If any of you thought of a story to share, I'd love to hear a couple of them now. The short version, please!  
We have an Ice Cream Social to get to!

Dolly Horse Story. Outcome?

## **WHAT'S JESUS TRYING TO SAY?**

Jesus' examples of being lost and being found are given in a pointed exchange to the "religious scholars." He is confronting their tendency toward discrimination. They're grumbling about "the kind of people" he was hanging around with and sitting at table with.

Basically, he's telling them: You *think* you know who's in and who's out, who's good and who's bad, who's lost and who's found in God's Circle. How the rules of the game work. What the conditions for inclusion are. But, don't be so sure about all that! God's Table fellowship and open arms are beyond anything you can imagine!

## **MY STORY/ROCKY**

The last couple weeks gave me quite the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be lost.....and what it means to be found.

I asked myself, as I pondered this passage, whether I felt lost – even when plunged suddenly into a swarm of medical diagnoses and procedures, calls from a son needing his mom, travel to arrange on one day's notice; and a myriad of medical people trying to help, and messages from doctors to make sense of.....

Even in the darkest moments, such as when the surgeon looked at me and, almost matter-of-factly said, **“I think it’s likely lymphoma.”**

Even when an email came last Friday saying, “Dear Ryan, I know you are anxiously awaiting your results, but your actual tonsils and lymph node have been sent off to the National Institute of Health because we need to make sure of the diagnosis....

and we won’t know anything for several more days whether it’s cancer or not....”

And my heart sank yet again....

Even then.

I can honestly say I never felt *lost*. Gloomy, grumpy, despairing, dismayed, yes! All of the above. But not lost.

For I was never out of the fold of God’s love and shepherding care

Nor was my child

Did I feel an overwhelming sense of God’s presence and reassurance in some supernatural way?

Not really

Did I find some incredible faith and the “power of positive thinking” to sugar coat my darkest hours of doubt and imagining the worst outcome in the middle of the night?

No, that wasn’t it either!

I did *not* feel the dark absence of God which sometimes happens in our rough moments, because...

I knew in my depths that I was *not* lost, nor was my family, because we were *still in the fold*, **because the other 99 came looking for us**

*You* all.

And Uncle Rams and Auntie Ewes as well!

And the prayer warriors and Angel armies that have come around us before

And the mothers and grandmothers who tirelessly sweep and search until the lost has been found...

And the Good Shepherd, of course, who *never* stops seeking the lost whether they have wandered off of their own volition or simply gotten lost...

A longtime friend and colleague from seminary checked in with me a few days into the Long Wait with these simple words of comfort that kept me going:

“And all *will* be well. And if it isn’t, you’ll be held up by those who love you and the God who gave you life.”

I knew that he was right. And I knew that I’d been found. Because *no matter what* the test results said, we were not on this journey alone. We would be enfolded by God and the other 99.

It takes a village. It takes a flock. It takes the other 99, working alongside the Shepherd.

This story has a happy ending—I wish they *all* did. And to those of you still in the depths and waiting for answers and procedures and test results –you are not alone! We are *with* you. With God.

Late Friday evening Rocky called as we were eating supper and said, “It’s mono, not lymphoma.” Like the Shepherd and the woman finding the coin, there was *much* rejoicing! We texted and emailed and called and posted to Facebook. And many joyful responses came back and surrounded us in our relief.

My best friend quipped:  
OMG! So happy to hear it’s mono...said no one before now.

I finally was able to *laugh* and go back to doing the mom thing and nag Rocky about healthy living and eating habits.

## **FINDING and FOUND TOGETHER**

What if...

this story from Jesus has a little twist. As we consider its message to us, in *our* story, in our setting.

What if...

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, *doesn’t leave* the 99 all alone and unprotected to go looking for the lost one?! What if he brings us *all* along to help search?

What if this story is a call to community—to seek together and be found together?

Not in a judgmental, “us and them,” insiders vs. outsiders way. Remember! Jesus was *countering* the Pharisees’ tendency to want to divide and put down and discriminate.

I don’t mean “seeking the lost” as we tend to say in some branches of Christianity. Getting those poor souls saved, buying-in to our belief system or “into the club.” As if *we* know what’s best for another’s journey or have the corner on the truth. It’s not even about getting butts in the seats – trying to get people back to our church (Fold).

But reaching out, seeking and finding dear ones beyond our flock and gathering them in, welcoming with open arms any who want to belong. Proclaiming loud and clear: “You are welcome here.”  
*No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey.* No matter what other flocks you might have

belonged to or left in the past –you are fully welcome here and we are glad you are among us!

We need each other in the Fold. We depend on each other on this journey of life and there's *always* another place at the feed trough, another flake in the hay bale.

We need to reach out, invite, offer a place to belong. Offer our love, support and prayers. Like “one hungry person telling another where to find bread,” as the saying goes.

We need to count who's here and go in search of those who have wandered off and encourage them to come back home — no questions asked!

We don't know if that little lamb sent out a beacon from his phone for the Search & Rescue to come looking! It doesn't matter. The Shepherd counted and the Fold knew someone was missing. That they didn't need a scolding for wandering off (“Where have you been?!” is the worst thing you can say to someone who finds their way back home — I don't ever want to hear that in this place!)

And, while we reach outside our circle, we come to realize how much we **value** this, our community. We need each other. We are going through the “valley of the shadow” a lot around here!

And most of us are already hanging on by our finger nails dealing with the latest medical or family crisis, that we can't even think about the wider world much.

We might feel lost, like the little sheep, or the coin, more often than we want to admit.

But we are *not* lost. Not at the end of the day, as night closes in. For our Shepherd goes searching for us, day and night and doesn't stop looking for us until we have been safely brought back into the fold.

Our community, our congregation, our family IS that Shepherd. We are the hands and feet of Christ in this place. We are the loving arms reaching out, seeking the lonely and unconnected, gathering in and bringing home.

And, we need to consider what it's going to take to keep this Fold growing, healthy and grazing long into the future so that we can *keep* searching, serving, finding and welcoming each other and even more others for many years to come.

“I once was lost, but now I'm found.  
Was blind but now I see!”

When we are lost we *will* be found, and we are never, ever, *outside* of the flock and *always* welcomed home to the sheepfold.

Welcome home! Wherever you are on life's journey, or wherever you've been wandering and wondering, you are found and loved in this Fold. Always. Thanks be to God.

Let's sing! “Amazing Grace” #422