

Sermon Notes, February 28, 2016

The Search Continues, Luke 15:1-10

Jesus is talking in this series of parables about lost things. For the last couple of weeks we've talked about the shepherd and the sheep that wanders off and why Jesus tells these parables. This morning, the parable that Jesus tells in vv. 8-10, is about a coin that is lost.

Now, let me make two side observations about this coin and its value.

1) The text says that it's just a coin—a silver coin—one out of ten.

It might seem to you and to me rather overly dramatic that a woman should get hysterical over losing a coin, even one in ten. You may have Bibles that say that the coin was equivalent to a drachma and a drachma was equivalent to a day's wages. In today's economy this amounts to something fairly substantial.

Kenneth Bailey writes that peasant women in and around the Sea of Galilee carry any cash held for daily expenses in a tightly knotted rag. The drachma, as I noted, was a day's wages for a laborer. Perhaps these ten coins were given to the wife to provide for the family for a week or two. She tied them up in her little rage but the knot worked loose and the coin fell out. Having failed to be more careful, she was filled with shame and remorse for her carelessness.

2) Notice something else. That is the progression as we go through these parables.

Jesus is trying to make a very intentional point, I believe.

The first parable, one sheep out of a hundred is lost.

In this parable, it's one coin out of ten.

And in the next parable, it's one son out of two.

Now the obvious inference for those of us who live in the Western world is that there's more value in the loss of a son, or one out of two, than there would be in 1 out of 100. 1% is not as significant as 50%. But that is not the way it is in God's economy.

Jesus is making just the opposite point as He tells these parables and as He changes the progression. In all three of the parables, the response to the rescue and to the restoration of that which is lost is the same! There's great rejoicing in the community. And the point behind all of that is there is great rejoicing in heaven over just one person who repents.

So Jesus is saying something very intentional here. He's saying that God's love is precious and it's equal no matter what the percentage—1 in 100, 1 in 10, 1 in 2, 2 for 2. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what the number is. It doesn't matter how large that number is. What matters is you. Each and every one of you. And He loves us the same. The common feature in these parables is a profound point about divine accounting—that is, God counts by ones!

I don't want us to lose sight of something very important so I want to return to a point that I made last week when I spoke about the parable of the Lost Sheep. Don't forget what prompts Jesus to tell these parables. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law complained that, "*Jesus welcomed (or receives) sinners and eats with them.*"

This is in keeping with the Pharisees very rigid boundary keeping. They set these boundaries around themselves to protect themselves from association against undesirables such as sinners and tax collectors. By doing this they were setting themselves apart as God's chosen ones, who were called to be holy in a world that was constantly being threatened by defiling impurity. The way of Jesus is different.

For Him, holiness was not, as we see here, a separation from sinners, as of separation from anything that inhibits full commitment to the God who is drawing near! It is not a status to be possessed and hedged around for self-protection, but a relationship to be celebrated and shared. Hence Jesus proclamation that "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"

As believers, we should be engaging the lost in meaningful relationships. Often in my experience in the church, *however*, I have seen the opposite. We withdraw from "the lost" for fear of compromising our testimony. But from the testimony and witness of Jesus it begs the question,

shouldn't we adopt the same full commitment to the God who draws near to those who are lost? It is Jesus' mission. We've seen this. So if this is God's plan and His mission, be assured that He will go ahead of you and work through you as you reach out to people.

So that being said, I want to mention two aspects of God's love that are highlighted in both of these parables.

1. The first is that we see and understand God's love taking the initiative.

The sheep and the coin, interestingly enough, have no idea that they're lost. The sheep wandered away carelessly. It may at some point come to this realization, but as far as we know, it doesn't understand it's lost. The coin falls to the floor, but it doesn't have any idea it's lost. It's an inanimate object. It doesn't know that it's lost. Jesus is addressing here the Pharisees and teachers of the law but He's also trying to communicate to you that God is always seeking you.

Over my years of ministry, and really since the Lord drew me into a relationship with Him, I have seen so many people come into church. Often they don't have a real good idea why they even came. It's sort of a vague notion. It's a feeling. It's a *nudge*. It's *undefined*. Some feel *driven*. Some come out of *desperation*. But oftentimes it isn't clear.

Someone comes because a friend *invited* him or her.

Another comes because of *grief or painful loss*.

Others come because, you know, *it's good for the kids*.

They didn't come with it all figured out in advance. They didn't even know that God brought them! Notice that the sheep and the coin do nothing really to be found here. That will change in the next one. But in these first two parables the sheep and the coin do nothing to be found. The point is that neither one is actively engaged in the search. Especially the coin.

Therefore, especially in this parable of the coin, this portrait of lostness is the most desperate of all. Its presence in the three parables here is a mark of hope for those who feel alone or in trouble or feeling adrift, in other words, who may be desperately lost even though they may not even be aware of it. It is God who sees that they are missing. He immediately begins the search. He takes the initiative. He looks, and doesn't stop looking until He finds them.

It is no accident that you're here. It is not a coincidence that you're here. It is not even your own doing that brought you here. It is God at work in your life. God always takes the initiative.

2. The second thing I want you to see is the intensity of the search.

In both parables it says the same thing. They both end the same way. They keep on searching until they find it. And then there is joy and great celebration. Here's the point and here's the principle. The intensity and extent to which one searches is in direct proportion to the value of what is lost.

The simple explanation for all of that is you are loved. It is because the Father will seek you at every turn. And He will not stop. The whole community turns out when these are found. They rejoice together. Jesus tells us there is even joyous laughter in heaven because of one single sinner who repents and discovers the finding love of God! Why? Because you are of such great value. God is infinitely and passionately concerned with the "lost." It is His own sheep—precious but lost. His silver coin. His own sons. And it is He who longs to have it restored and rejoices when He has recovered it!

God's love always initiates. It always begins with God. It has to. Remember He tells us that *"there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

Thus His is a love that will intensely search out those who are lost until He finds them.