

III Trinity 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
1 Peter 5.5-11 St. Luke 15.1-10

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Most of us have taken a wrong turn on a road trip and found our selves seriously lost. We don't even have to go very far...just try driving in Hillsborough...at night! Getting lost is no fun!

Church is the place we learn God goes out looking for us when we take a wrong turn and get lost...to bring us home. God doesn't want us to stay lost. Welcome to God's Lost and Found Department!

This morning's Gospel is the story of The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. They are two parts of the Trilogy that includes The Lost Son. All three stories teach us the same lesson...the unrestricted and unsparing love of God in seeking out those of us who have lost our way...and His joy in finding and rescuing us from evil. We will have to wait until next year to hear the story of the Lost Son...since it falls on August 6th this year...we will celebrate the Transfiguration instead.

The virtual farmer in the story of The Lost Sheep discovers one of his sheep is missing. Sheep don't do well on their own...they need the safety of the flock...the sheep pen...and the farmer who cares for and loves them. The farmer goes off looking for his lost sheep. When he finds the lost sheep he places it on his shoulders and brings it back to the safety and security of the sheep pen. One of the most compelling religious icons is that of Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying the rescued sheep on his shoulders. The lost sheep...is us! Then the farmer celebrates. God celebrates with the farmer!

The virtual woman in the story of The Lost Coin has a different problem. Jesus incorporates a silver coin into the story because it represented a day's wage...about \$200. Jesus doesn't give us any details about the woman. We get the impression she may have been poor and a widow. The ten silver coins may have been her life savings or maybe an inheritance. Regardless...the lost coin would have been impossible for her to replace. We can understand her desperation in looking for the coin. If we misplaced \$200 wouldn't we go looking for the lost money. When she finds the missing coin...it's time for her to celebrate. God celebrates with her!

Both stories...The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin...are about God's love, compassion and infinite

power to forgive and welcome us home, no matter how degraded, marginalized or excluded from society...or even the parish family...we think we are. The two stories are about us...getting rescued even when we think we don't deserve it or are beyond God's help. God is the one who begins the process of restoration and forgiveness. He actively goes out to find those of us who are lost so he can rescue us. The story of the Lost Son makes the point much clearer.

The Good News for us...when our priorities in life get messed up and we get lost...we don't have to stay lost. Jesus gives us the way out of our messes. The religious leaders of Jesus' time found his message radical and disturbing. They understood God forgave repentant sinners. They had a hard time believing in a God who went out searching for those who needed to repent and be forgiven...so he could welcome them home. The 99 virtual sheep in the story also needed to be rescued. No one can claim to be perfect and never needing to repent.

Jesus shows us through his own acts of humility that God's capacity to forgive is infinite and available to anyone who asks for it regardless of who they are, what zip code they live in, or whether they are wealthy or poor. Humility leads us to become the kind of people God wants us to be...full of compassion and mercy and love toward others. Our friend Saint Peter tells us we should all be subject to each other and wear humility like a coat. Peter tells us when we show humility...God "will lift us up in his own good time...and to leave all our worries with him...because he cares for us."

God loves all of humanity. He may not like what we do at times. But he loves the people he has created. He loves...you and me...sinner and saint...tax collector and priest...politician and teacher. None of us are ever beyond God's love and reach...even if we think we have messed our lives up so badly even he can't help us. And we cannot exclude people we don't like...or we think are beneath us. God can help them too.

The Church is God's Lost and Found Department on Earth. When we find ourselves taking a wrong turn and getting lost...Jesus comes looking for us. He is better than any GPS in helping us find our way home. And when he finds us and we are restored to wholeness...it's time for a celebration.

So...let's celebrate! And God and all the Angels and Saints will celebrate with us!

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