

III Trinity 2024  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*1 Peter 5.5-11 St. Luke 15.1-7*



What spiritual lessons do we learn from a farmer who loses one sheep, and a widow who loses one silver coin? The farmer has ninety-nine other sheep to keep him busy; isn't that enough sheep. The widow has nine more silver coins; isn't that enough money to live on?

Author Gary Richmond admits in his book *All God's Creatures: Spiritual Lessons from the Animals of the Bible*, sheep aren't his favorite animal; but they must be God's, since sheep and shepherds are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are two parts of a trilogy that includes the Lost Son. Jesus is often criticized for hanging out with the wrong crowd, such as the tax collectors and "other outcasts" in today's Gospel. He welcomed them and even had lunch with them.

In the story of the Lost Sheep, a farmer discovers one of his sheep has gone missing. Sheep are not very smart. They wander off and get lost. They get confused about where they are and can't find their way back home.

The farmer leaves the ninety-nine sheep safe and secure in the sheep pen and sets out to find his lost sheep. When he finds the sheep, he picks the sheep up and carries it home, back to the safety and security of the sheep pen. Then he sends an email to all his friends and asks them to celebrate with him.

Jesus concludes the story of the Lost Sheep by saying, "...I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent. In fact, there is no such thing as a respectable person who does not need to repent." That's why we need Jesus.

In the story of the Lost Coin, a widow loses a silver coin. As an avid coin collector, I find this story interesting on an incarnational level. The silver coin was likely a Denarius...in Jesus' time a day's wage for soldiers, sailors and unskilled workers. The Spanish word for money...*dinero*...comes from the same root word as the Denarius.

The silver coins in the story represented financial security for the widow. They may have been an inheritance or a dowry. If one coin was a day's wage, let's call it \$200 in modern currency; the ten coins would have been a substantial sum of money. Wouldn't we go looking for \$200 we thought we had lost? We can understand the woman in the story wanting to celebrate with her friends when finds the lost coin. Jesus concludes the story of the Lost Coin by saying, "...I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents."

We sometimes get ourselves into the trap of judging people harshly because we see in them something we don't like about ourselves. Before we can even consider helping someone find his way home, we need to start the journey home ourselves. The stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are about God actively seeking those of us who get lost, and we all do from time-to-time, so he can bring us back to the safety and security of the Church.

There is a wonderful 19<sup>th</sup> Century hymn, *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*, written by Anthony Showalter (1858-1924) with music composed by Presbyterian minister Elisha Hoffman (1839-1929). It is based on a verse in Deuteronomy (33.27), "God has always been our defense; his eternal arms are our support." The words may not be familiar to Anglicans, but there is rich teaching in the hymn...

*...What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, safe and  
secure from all alarms;  
Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, leaning  
on the everlasting arms.*

You will have to wait until the Ninth Sunday after Trinity for Father Herb to tell the Story of the Lost Son. I will be in England...I might even visit a sheep farm while I'm there.

Jesus has given us a new and hopeful teaching about repentance and forgiveness. God reaches out to save us through Jesus. He wants to make certain we are safe and secure...and no longer lost.

