

III Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

I Peter 5.5-11 St. Luke 15.1-11

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Why did Jesus reach out to tax collectors and other outcasts? He even went so far as to have lunch with them. The religious leaders in the Gospel couldn't understand why Jesus would make himself ritually unclean by hanging out with people who happened to have been born in the wrong Zip Code. Jesus reached out to the marginalized and disenfranchised so they too could hear and respond to his message of hope and forgiveness.

The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are parts I and II of a trilogy that teach us the same lesson. The third installment is the Parable of the Lost Son. We will have to wait until the Ninth Sunday after Trinity to hear that story. All three stories are about the unrestricted and unsparing love of God in seeking out those who have lost their way...no matter who they are...and His joy in finding and rescuing them from evil.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus explains he uses parables to reveal mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to those who have faith and to conceal the truth from those who are spiritually unreceptive. In other words, the tax collectors and other outcasts having lunch with Jesus were eager to hear the truth about God's Kingdom and ready to repent. The religious leaders were convinced they were morally and spiritually superior to the tax collectors and other outcasts. Their hearts, minds and souls were closed to anything Jesus had to say.

In the parable of the Lost Sheep...a farmer loses one of his sheep. His life's work was all about his sheep...all of them. He leaves the other 99 sheep goes out to find the 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 icons is that of Jesus the Good Shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders. He had good reason to celebrate!

In the parable of the Lost Coin...a woman loses one of 10 silver coins. The coin was likely a denarius or drachma...both coins circulated freely. The silver coin was equivalent to a day's wages. The 10 coins may have been an inheritance or dowry. Let's say the silver coin was worth \$200. The Gospel tells us the woman lit a lamp and swept her house looking everywhere...she turned the house "upside down and inside out"...until she found the coin. Then she called her friends to help her celebrate. Wouldn't we go looking for \$200 we misplaced somewhere in the house? Wouldn't we have a reason to celebrate?

Jesus concludes the story of the Lost Sheep by saying there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent. What does he say about the Lost Coin? The angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents. Even the self-righteous religious leaders in the Gospel can know the joy of being forgiven and starting over if they open up their hearts, minds and souls to God's love and compassion.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin represent those of us who have lost our way and need help finding our way back home. If we think we have messed up our lives so badly and are so lost even God can't find us...think again. We will learn from the Parable of the Lost Son, no one is beyond God's reach and he is eager to help us find our way home, and he and the angels in heaven rejoice...because we are no longer lost.

God loves all of humanity. He loves...you and me...sinner and saint...tax collector and priest...politician and teacher. We cannot exclude people we don't like...or we think are beneath us...or not worth God's time. That's not our call. The marginalized and disenfranchised people of today have God's attention, and he can help anyone who is open to being helped and saved.

That gives us every reason to rejoice and celebrate!

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