

III Trinity 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

1 Peter 5.5-11 St. Luke 15.1-7

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“Once upon a time” is the classic beginning to children’s story books and fables. The stories often end with “and everyone lived happily ever after”. The words to the story draw children in and let them use their imaginations to visualize the characters in the stories.

The parables of Jesus are short stories intended to teach, convey a message, and encourage the people to take some positive action. The word “parable” in Greek literally means “to set beside”...or in English “a comparison”. Jesus’ parables are “word pictures” told in language people understood. His parables are just as important to us today as they were to people 2000 years ago.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are the first two stories of a trilogy that includes the Lost Son. We will hear about the Lost Son on the Ninth Sunday after Trinity. All three parts of the trilogy have the same message...every individual has immense, undeniable, value to God. God’s love for us is relentless. He actively seeks those who are spiritually lost. There is joy in heaven when even one person repents and is restored.

This was new and radical teaching and not one the religious leaders in the Gospel were ready to accept. They were especially critical of Jesus and judged him harshly for spending time with tax collectors and “sinners”. The “respectable” religious types went out of their way to avoid the kind of people Jesus hung out with. Jesus even went so far as to have lunch with the outcasts and disenfranchised people who were eager to hear what he had to say and experience hope and God’s love.

In the story of the Lost Sheep, a man loses one of his sheep. Sheep were a valuable commodity and one sheep cost a day’s wages. The man leaves his 99 other sheep in the pasture...where they were safe out in the open and could see danger coming. The lost sheep, however, had wandered off...perhaps into a valley from which there was no escape. The man rescues the lost sheep, puts it on his shoulders, and brings it back home. He then calls his friends to celebrate the sheep’s return. Jesus concludes this story by saying there will be great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 respectable people who don’t need to repent.

In the story of the Lost Coin, a woman who has ten silver coins loses one coin. The coin in the story was probably a *denarius* or *drachma*... the equivalent of a day's wages. The silver coins in the story may represent the woman's life savings or an inheritance. Jesus doesn't give us any details but the woman was likely a widow. Considering the floor in her home was dirt...a small silver coin could easily get lost. She had every reason to celebrate when she finds the lost silver coin. Jesus concludes this story by saying the angels of God in heaven will rejoice over one sinner who repents.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin teach us God considers every human being valuable and worth saving. It does not matter who we are, where we live, or what we do for a living. It very much matters what we think about others. We are called to be Church and to set an example by showing the same kind of compassion and love toward others who are just as valuable in God's eyes as we are.

The two stories and that of the Lost Son are meant to teach us about humility...the opposite of arrogant self-righteousness. Even those of us who attend Mass regularly and do all we can to live according to God's plan...can get caught in the trap of thinking we are better than everyone else. God knows what's in our hearts and is happy when we stop thinking and doing bad things and turn our lives around.

Both the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin have to do with repentance and reconciliation to God. There is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents and is sorry for his sin. There is more rejoicing in heaven when the 99 sheep get the message and realize they too need to repent and be reconciled to God.

God keeps company with the people he loves...you and me...sinner and saint...IRS agent and priest...politician and teacher. And Jesus shows us just how far God will reach to bring us back into his company when we get lost...and the joy he has when we return.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Picture this: In heaven... the Angels of God rejoice when we get the message and are sorry for saying and doing the bad things that hurt us and others...and come home to God...safe and secure...and then we are no longer lost.

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