



COMMUNITY
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

MINISTER
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September 12, 2004
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 15:1-7
Psalm 23

Lost in Grace

Intro Our New testament lesson is from Luke. It continues the sheep and shepherd theme. Let us listen for God's word as it comes to us in the parable of the lost sheep. (READ/ Pray)

One of the great griefs of life is that we keep losing things. Writing pens, reading glasses, favorite toys -- car keys! -- we just keep losing things. The truth is we lose things in life. And not just favorite possessions or needed articles -- we also can lose hope, or lose our dreams, or most painful of all, our loved ones. And, not only do we lose things but we also get lost. I get lost most anytime I drive anywhere outside of a five-mile radius of my home and I've now learned to stop and ask for directions! This kind of lost is inconvenient and frustrating but not terribly unsettling.

But there is LOST, with a capital L that we may have felt at sometime in the past, or perhaps some are feeling right now. So lost that we not only don't know WHERE we are but we're not

sure WHO we are; lost as in we have been cut off from every sense of security and reality that we ever knew -- "existentially lost" the philosophers would say - but it's far too primal a fear for such big intellectual word. It's Lost like we don't know if we will ever be found again, or if we will ever be safe again.

Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep because he is trying desperately to connect with the Pharisees who are criticizing Jesus for hanging out with the wrong people. The Pharisees called them sinners. Jesus called them friends. The religious folk turned their backs on them and told them they were not welcome at church. Jesus hung out and ate with them in their homes. Religious folk thought that the lost were cut off from God. Jesus said it was in fact TO

the lost that God had sent him.

And so, to try to help the Pharisees see things from his point of view Jesus tells them this parable. It's a parable about the relentless, reckless love of God. About a love that refuses to count 2 in the hand as reason enough for leaving one in the bush. Like a shepherd who would leave the 99 and go search till the lost one is found, so it is in the kingdom of God Jesus says. And in this parable Jesus tells us what his ministry is all about it's a matter of extending God's love to those who are lost or somehow feel cut off.

This is the good news of the gospel if you feel lost, God wants to lift you on the shoulders of grace, bring you home, and restore you again.

Jesus' story is one that we can all relate to. It's about how we feel when lost things are found. Let's listen to the story now from another perspective as we visit an open meeting of L. S. A. - that's Lost Sheep Anonymous (skit)

Hi, my name is LAMBert... and I was a lost sheep.

(choir Hi LAMBert!)

Well, I guess I'm here to tell you my story. It happened a while ago but when I think about it now it still gives me the woollies !

It all started one day when I wandered away from the flock looking for some

shade. I see now it was a baaad thing to do but I found this great cottonwood tree and I just kind of flopped down under its branches. The grass there was so soft and the breeze so cool that I ended up taking a nap.

I had this wonderful dream about green pastures and still waters-it really restored my soul. When I woke up, I at first just felt kind of sheepish about how long I had been dozing but then I realized the flock had moved on and I didn't know where they were and I got down right scared! I thought to myself I got to get baaack to my friends!

So I started to run the way I thought they might have gone but my hoof got caught in a hole and I tripped and rolled down into a ravine. It was awful! The sides of the ravine were so steep that I just couldn't get out. I baaahhd really loud for a while hoping someone would hear me but then my throat got sore and it started to get dark.

That's when I heard them howling-the wolves I mean. I don't mind telling you I was terrified. It didn't take long for the wolves to find me-we sheep have our own smell you know we like to think of it as a perfume; in fact we call it, Just for Ewe -the fragrance that'll make them flock to your side.

Anyway, there was about four wolves who started circling me. I tried to look mean and tough like I was dangerous but the wolves knew that sheep don't have any sharp teeth-I mean, what was I

going to do? Graze 'em to death? Forage on their fur? I was terrified! The wolves got closer and baaacked me into a corner. And then, just as they were about to attack, from out of nowhere, my shepherd jumps in front of me.

It surprised the wolves but they didn't run away; in fact, one lunged right at his throat. I couldn't believe it! He just stepped to the side and baaatted the wolf right on the head with his shepherd staff-I always wondered why he carried that stick! When the other wolves saw what happened and heard their leader yelping with pain they decided to dine elsewhere for dinner and ran away.

The shepherd then turned to face me and I thought he was going to yell and be mad and scold me for wandering off and getting lost. I was thinking he might use that shepherd's staff on me-you know, to knock a little sense into my head-but when he turned to me he had this great big smile on his face and a few tears in his eyes. He bent down and gave me a big hug and kept saying over and over again, "I found you! I'm so glad I found you!"

I couldn't believe it! I had no idea that he loved me so much. I looked around for the rest of the flock and they weren't there and suddenly I realized he had left them all behind and had come out just to look for me! Just for me!! I couldn't help it. I just started crying and baaaing. I tried to stand up and walk but my hoof wouldn't hold my weight. That's when my shepherd picked me up and put me on his shoulders and carried

me all the way baaaack home. And that's how this lost sheep got saved instead of savored!

A strange thing can happen when we feel lost. Like Lambert, we can begin to think that since we are lost we must be bad and that there is something wrong with us. The result is that we can end up hiding from God assuming God doesn't want to have anything to do with us anymore.

But listen! The parable says, when we are most lost, God is most searching for us. Jesus says here, no matter how far away we may feel, he will come and save us. No matter how long it has been since we strayed, he loves us and wants to know us better.

Here's another little vignette to remind us that we are never really lost, it's just that sometimes we haven't felt found yet! (Skit Phone call to lost and found)

Yes, operator, give me Heaven please....
Uh, collect if they'll accept.... Hi!

Thanks for taking the call... yes, you can thank you, I'd like to speak with the Lost and Found Department.... yes, hi, this is Dan Yeaz..... you recognize my voice? Really? Well, who is this?... Fred?

That doesn't sound very angelic... well, I don't know. Michael or Gabriel, something a little more lofty I guess.... yeah, no, I guess that makes sense, they're in public relations, sure....

Huh? Oh well, I don't know if you can help or not... okay. I know you're the lost and found and people are probably always contacting you about something they've lost, right?... yeah, well I'm calling because I'M LOST!... no, you don't have to read me my address -- I know where I live.

What I mean is that I feel, I feel lost from God. There, I said it. I feel distant and cut off and so very far away; and the worst part is that I don't know if I will ever get back.... well, yeah, I used to pray but my life is so messed up I don't think God even wants to hear my prayers anymore... are you kidding, you can do that??... Well, I don't know, being transferred over to God's office, isn't that kind of radical? I thought you'd just suggest a good church or something - I mean, come on, God would talk to me??... well, okay if you think so... no wai... Oh great, I'm on hold waiting to talk to God! What am I going to say??... Fred! Oh, I'm so glad it's you, I was afraid... God wasn't in? Or was God just not in for me? That's it, isn't it? God doesn't want to have anything to do with me right?... don't try to explain, I understand. Why should God care about me? I mean I know what I've done, I know who I am. I don't blame... God is searching for who?... For me!? God is out searching for me, right now? Isn't there kind of a lot to supervise up there? I mean, who's watching the business? God can't have time for... really? For me??... That just blows me away. You know, just knowing that I, I don't feel so lost anymore.

Hey, Fred, thanks a lot this has been great... Oh well you all are super... no, I just thought I'd take a long shot with your lost and found department... yeah!... well, now that you mention it, there is one more thing... well back in the 5th grade I lost my imperial Duncan yo-yo. Can help me find that?... hello? Hello, Fred? Huh, seems like we lost our connection!

Some of us today feel distant-even lost to God. We don't see how God can still love us after all we've done and all we have failed to do. And yet Jesus is searching for us to bring us home. Some of us have parts of our lives that are lost to God. They are hidden in the shadow of shame and so we try to hide lest we be discovered. And yet Jesus is searching for us to bring us home.

Some of us have been knocked down by a crisis and we don't know which way is up and we feel lost to ourselves and all of life. And yet Jesus is searching for us to bring us home. And some of us do have a sense of joy about being found by God, lifted up on those shoulders of grace and being carried with great joy and celebration back home.

Wherever you are. Whoever we are. Whatever you have made of your life, Look at the face of God and see there, for you, not a frown or a scowl but the smile of one who searches for you in love and who wants to bring you home today. This is the good news you're not lost -- at most, you just may not be found yet... until now? AMEN.