

## **Luke 15:1-10**

There was a saying among the Jewish people that God rejoiced when those who provoked Him perished from the world. Jesus' view of the heavenly Father is very different from that. All heaven rejoices, He says, when even one sinner, not perishes, but repents. You (and Jesus means every single one of you) are so precious to your God that heaven erupts in joyous singing when you turn from your sin and repent.

Thinking this through a bit, it must be very difficult, on an emotional level, to be an angel. One day we're causing them to rejoice, but the next day they're shedding tears over us...because one day we're a lost sinner found by Jesus, and the next we're wandering away and becoming lost again. Repentance for the Christian is lifelong. If we're not in the daily habit of turning in sorrow away from our sins, then we do not understand what it is to repent, and we remain in a lost condition.

Thank God that Jesus seeks those who are lost. The rabbis in Jesus' day did not agree with this. They believed that God welcomed sinners who repented, yes; but it was unheard of among them that God would actually go and seek sinners to bring them back. But if that was not His way, there isn't one of us who would be with Him today. We sheep have it within our nature to wander and become lost. We who are precious silver coins within the house of the church, have within our makeup the propensity to seek out those dark places wherein we become lost. But God has a heart of mercy toward lost sinners. He is not angry, desiring to punish such people. He acts in love to find the lost, and when He finds them, He rejoices, and all the angels with Him.

Lost sheep are not usually aware of the fact that they are lost. A sheep that has wandered away from all the others may be quite happy and content right where it's at. It does not have a sense of urgency realizing that danger lurks all around it. And even if it does, it can do nothing about it. It cannot find its way back. It's not just lost; it's helplessly lost. And it's not just lost with regard to its physical location; it's lost within its heart and mind.

A lost sheep deceives itself therefore. To be lost means to be apart from its shepherd. And such a sheep falls easily into misbelief. "I'm not lost," it convinces itself, "even though I'm not with my shepherd; my shepherd says: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age;' so, therefore, I'm not lost." But then why does Jesus go in search of such a sheep, if it's not lost? If Jesus is with every one of His sheep always, even unto the end of the world, then there can be no such thing as a lost sheep. And then His parable here in Luke 15 is useless; there's no point to it.

Our Shepherd is with us always, dear sheep, within the preaching and teaching of His Word, and within the bread and wine of His Sacrament. He leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one who is lost because the ninety-nine are in the open pasture. They are being fed and watered in that place where their shepherd had led them. Not so with the one that is lost. It's lost because it's not in the pasture where its shepherd had led it. It has wandered away from the faithful hearing of Jesus' words; away from the regular reception of His holy Sacrament.

A sheep that is lost is a morsel of food, a tidbit, for the wolves. A coin that is lost within the house becomes covered with dust. It sits in its dark place away from the light. If the light was shining on it, it wouldn't be lost.

Both of these describe us pretty well, dear fellow sinners. As a lost sheep, I am naive. I think I'm fine. I say to myself: "I don't need to be around Jesus all that much. Besides, He's with me always, so I can hear His words and receive His Sacrament when it works for me." But the wolves have already gotten to such a one, for this thinking, this belief, is not of the Holy Spirit, not of the Shepherd; it comes from the evil foe who deceives us with his lies.

As a lost coin within the house of the church, I think I'm fine because I'm still in the house. I may not be with the other nine coins, coming faithfully to worship, study, and receive, but I'm still in the house of the church. My name is on the rolls. I don't come to the light, true, when the Word is preached and taught, but I still work at the dinners; I'm still in the house somewhere. Oh, how covered we are with the dust of misbelief! Unless the light shines on us, we remain lost in the darkness.

The best thing about being a lost sheep and a lost coin is that Jesus seeks those who are lost. He seeks through His pastors, church elders, and other members. He seeks through family members, friends, coworkers. If you are a faithful sheep today, it's not because you or I are so good at being faithful. It's because Jesus sought you and found you through someone He placed into your life. And He probably did this a number of times. Faithful sheep are not faithful because they have it within themselves to be so faithful. They're faithful sheep because Jesus keeps seeking them and bringing them back when they become lost.

Becoming lost is a problem we all share. Thank God we all have a gracious Lord. He allowed Himself to become lost for you. He entered the place of the lost as He hung on the cross. He sat in the darkness, away from the light. Jesus did this to bring you out of that darkness into the light of God's love. He lost Himself in hell in order to find us there and bring us away from the power of sin and the devil.

Jesus was there, my friend. He was in the darkness; He was lost to His heavenly Father. And so He knows where to find you when you become lost in the darkness. He knows where to seek you; and He does seek you as your gracious God who loves you dearly.

There is no need to run from Him who seeks you. He forgives you for wandering away from Him. He forgives you for preferring to hide in the dark recesses of His house. He cleanses you of the dust and filth of your sins through the sacred waters of your Baptism. He leads you out of the darkness to His Table of Grace to rejoin your brothers and sisters in Christ in receiving His life and salvation.

No one is too lost for Jesus to find. No one is too filthy and covered with dust for Jesus to love. He loves you. He seeks you. He forgives you. And He carries you back home on His shoulders, rejoicing. Amen.