

**Luke 15:1-10.**

*Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. <sup>8</sup> “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

**Share in Christ's Love for the lost**

- 1. Jesus sees value in each one of us**
- 2. He teaches us to view all people as precious**
- 3. He moves us to demonstrate his persistent love**

Early on Thursday morning a semi carrying 45,000 pounds of tiny copper colored discs was headed through Delaware when it crashed. The semi was on its way to the US mint in Philadelphia in order that these tiny metal discs may be made into pennies, but sometime around 1:50am the semi lost control and struck the concrete median hard enough that the truck and trailer flipped and the entire payload, numbering about 8 million would-be pennies, was spilled all over Interstate Hwy 95. The driver escaped with only minor injuries, but the main news of the day was that traffic was delayed for nearly 13 hours as crews cleaned up the mess. Picking up the tiny discs by hand often using only hand brooms and dust pans or just plain fingers it was a large and tiresome task. Besides clearing the highway each disc, each coin, would have some value and therefore each coin-to-be, no matter how small, how insignificant, had to be found and picked up, even if it took 13 hours.

In our gospel lesson for today Jesus tells a story about some coins. His story however focused on the value of just one coin. Speaking to a mixed crowd of Pharisees and tax-collectors, respected teachers of the law and those publicly disgraced because of their sins he said this, <sup>8</sup> *“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the*

***presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.***” This was the one of the main lessons that he was hoping to teach: Each soul is precious to God.

There are roughly 320 million people strewn throughout this great land of ours, and about 7 billion of us scattered throughout the entire world and yet Jesus values each one of us. He does not want to see a single one of us kicked to the curb and lost forever; so he is patient in his compassionate search and care for us. And now as his followers, as his disciples, he desires that we would demonstrate this same type of persistent love as we seek out and reach out to others. Dear Christians, let us share in Christ’s love for the lost.

An ancient believer named Augustine once wrote: *God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.* God’s love for you is personal. Even though there are so many people in this world, so many billions of people throughout history, God loves you, he loves each one of us. And Jesus’ personal love for sinners is certainly seen here, even before he speaks a word of the parables. He is out among the people. Meeting them one by one and he even takes the time out of his schedule to eat and to drink, to visit and to teach, to heal, and help and save those that he met along the way. And it didn’t matter how little worth the rest of the world assigned to you, Jesus made it known through his words and actions that you mattered and you have value in his eyes. There were many things about Jesus that bothered the Pharisees and teachers of the law, but it was this aspect of his character that caused them in this particular moment to mutter in clear disdain, ***“This man welcomes sinner and eats with them.”***

Before we take the Pharisees and teachers of the law to task on their prideful mutterings. We should consider the kinds of not so nice things that we say, that we think, that we mutter, about our neighbors, or the people in our community, or even the people within our family or our congregation, that we have for one reason or the other, labeled or treated as inferior to ourselves. This is an important lesson for us to remember, for those of us, who learned from little on to sing, “Jesus loves me this I know” we must remember that this is a song that everyone could sing. Jesus loves me and he loves all the world. He loves each and every soul. Each person, each soul, has value in his eyes. Our Savior wants us to see the world with similar eyes and so he speaks in a way that would enable us to see things a bit differently. So that we may view each person as precious to God, he regularly sits down with the outcast and the forsaken, he patiently endures the criticism of the proud and the haughty. Each soul is precious to him, so he spends time with, he visits with, he eats with all types of people and then he teaches these parables.

Luke chapter 15 is this wonderful “lost” section of Scripture and at the very end of the chapter he tells the beloved parable of the lost son or the prodigal son that speaks so clearly of God’s love for sinners. But even before the lost son or the lost coin, Jesus reminds us all of his sincere concern and love for the lost and teaches us to view all people as precious to God. His critics mutter under their breath and Jesus in return speaks to them ***this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>***

***and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'***

Instead of being critical of Jesus, a time of muttering and complaining, it should have been a time of rejoicing. Jesus was reaching out to those who were lost in sin, those who had wandered off into spiritual danger. To bring a single lost soul close to himself, back to God, and back to the body of believers was a joyous occasion. This is again a lesson that we often need to relearn and remember as well. There may be times when we become critical or mutter under our breath when certain individuals are brought back to God's house. A part of us may cringe to think such a sinner is in my church? Instead of welcoming back those who had wandered away from church, wandered away from God, a part of us may simply shrug and say in attitude and action, "Where have they been?" Jesus teaches us such a time is not a time for judgment or criticism, but it is a time of rejoicing.

Think of it this way, within the last few years we have had the privilege to witness the joy of baptism a good number of times. There is a certain tangible joy as we look with fondness upon the baby in the arms of a mother or father or sponsor. This precious little child washed and cleansed and brought into the family of God. What a joyous time! That precious little lamb held in the arms of the Good Shepherd. That same kind of joy is to be had when a lost sheep, an older believer, is brought back to God. The same kind of joy that we express that we gladly celebrate when a child, a precious little lamb, is made a child of God, is the same kind of joy that God wants us to have when a Christian of any age is brought back to the body of believers. A precious soul brought back to a closer relationship with God. He desires that we rejoice with him when a lost sheep is found!

As he speaks to the Pharisees and teacher of the law, he speaks to them in a way that they could relate, he speaks of way that they might normally react to something in their own life. This is something that even you, yourselves would do. He says to them, 'Suppose any one of you, loses one of many sheep, will you not go after that one. And when you find it, you will joyfully put it on your shoulders and go home.' I think this is revealing in the way he speaks of this as well. Often we look at this section and we think of Jesus being the Good Shepherd and going and rescuing that sheep. But who is the shepherd in this scenario? He speaks instead of any one of them: *suppose one of you any one of you*. As he describes God's love for the lost, Jesus is teaching anyone of them and each one of us to see every soul as precious to God, to rejoice in this rescue effort, and to even assist him in this effort to love and seek out and care for the lost.

This is the love that God has, this is the attitude that you and I ought to share. I don't think it should be overlooked that he phrases things in this way, "Suppose one of you". Very likely each one of you knows a person who has taken some wrong turns in life, who has wandered from the faith, who would benefit greatly from being brought back to the fold, the fellowship of the church, and most importantly a closer walk with Jesus. Very likely each one of us knows of someone who would fit that description and so this not only moves us to see that each soul is precious to God, but it moves us to help our Savior in reaching out to the lost, the wandering, the straying sheep among us. And as we consider how we may assist our Savior in this important effort we note the kind of

persistent and selfless love that he describes. The willingness to take up such a task, the time put in to find this lost sheep, and then to arrive upon the scene and not just call or yell at or drag this sheep so it is back where it needs to be, but notice how this sheep is finally retrieved. ***And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders<sup>6</sup> and goes home.*** The one who goes searching puts this sheep up on his shoulders. This is not just calling and the sheep automatically follows. But putting in the effort to lean down and lift up and help that animal home.

When we seek the lost and the straying among us, may we be moved in a similar way that demonstrates the persistent love of our Savior. As we seek out the lost may we be moved to not only invite and call back home those who haven't been to church in a while or have wandered down dangerous paths, but we ought to expect and be willing to put in the extra effort that this may take. May the Lord Jesus give us a heart of love and a willingness to seek out and find the lost and the straying among us and then find a way to lift them up on our shoulders so that we may bring them home. Of course, this is not a literal thing, where you would throw people over your shoulder and lug them through the church doors. But we are reminded that this may not be as simple as single visit, a phone call, or invitation, but several, many conversations, many phone calls and invitations. Speak to your neighbors, your friends, your niece or nephew, your son and daughter, whoever it may be. Share in their burdens, find out what's weighing on them. Find out what burdens you can help them with. Patiently invite them to speak to your pastor, or come to church, and then be ready to put in the extra effort. Be persistent and patient. Bring them copies of the sermon or the meditations booklets. Go to them and go to them again in love saying, *"I'll go with you."* *"Come to bible class with me. I'll even pick you up."* *"Come to church and then you can bring the family over for dinner at my place or we can go get something to eat together afterwards."* Gladly find ways to lean down and lift them up onto your shoulders. Go the extra mile. Find ways to lift that person up on your shoulders as you seek to bring them back to the flock, the church, restore them to the family of believers, and God-willing a closer relationship with their Savior.

As we look at the task before us of reaching out to the lost it might be even more intimidating as cleaning up a mess of pennies strewn across the interstate. But this morning we learn of Jesus' love for the lost and we rejoice in it, we share in it. Remember how precious each individual soul is to God and think of ways that you can reach out to that one or two individuals in your own life. Jesus sees value in each of us so much that he gave his life for us all. He spent time on this earth to find and rescue you from your sins, to bring you close. He gave his life for you and me, and for all sinners; for you, your family, your friends, your neighbors, no matter their current social status or their past mistakes. That personal love of our Savior leads us to see others, all people, as precious. The incredible and persistent and patient love of our God and Savior moves us to demonstrate his persistent love as well. Let us share in our Savior's love for the lost, welcoming with great joy those who are brought back to God and searching out with great love those who are precious to our Savior. AMEN.