**Stop, Search, and Celebrate**

Based on [Luke 15:1-10](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk15.1-10)

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The Third Sunday after Trinity

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These parables of the lost are stories that illustrate how important our salvation is to God. These parables show how earnestly God searches for his sheep, how obsessive he is about finding even one sinner who repents. He does not desire the death of the sinner, but that all would come to repentance. And should anyone be lost eternally, it wasn’t for lack of effort or interest on God’s part. God’s number one priority is to find that which he had lost…and this means to bring sinners to repentance.

In the beginning, God created all things. And he created mankind--male and female--to have dominion over all things. But He lost us. He lost us not because of His own negligence, but because Adam and Eve abused their freedom and became accomplices of Satan. Now, every man woman and child from the womb to the tomb is by nature lost, estranged from God unless and until God finds them, claims them as his own, and reclaims them to be his own possession.

These parables explain how God has made our salvation his priority. They appeal to the cultural sensibilities of Jesus’ day, but we should have no trouble understanding them. None of us has ever lost a sheep, and though we’ve probably lost coins, no coin to us is worth the time to look for it. But, what do you do if you lose your purse or wallet? What do you do if you lose your cat or dog? What do you do if you lose your toddler? Your important plans for the day are all put on hold, whatever you’re doing you stop doing, and you begin to think, and plan, and search for your lost purse, pet or child.

That’s the essence of these parables…that when Satan deceived and murdered mankind…heaven did not carry on business as usual. God rested on the seventh day of creation, but after the Fall, God rested no longer. Jesus says so. When the Pharisees accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus said in his defense, “**My Father is working until now, and I am working**.”

God made the Sabbath day, but the Pharisees were the ones who forbid even emergency work on the Sabbath. Jesus teaches that they misunderstand the seventh day if they think God means people to (so to speak) “play the fiddle while Rome burns.” Those who think the Sabbath forbids acts of mercy do not understand. Just as anyone would get off of their laurels to rescue someone out of a burning car on the Sabbath, so too God does not rest while we are lost.

It is these same Pharisees to whom Jesus addresses the parables of the lost. They were upset that Jesus was receiving sinners and eating with them. But Jesus says that this is what he came to do, to seek and save the lost. **And now that he has found them and he celebrates with them and eats with them.** …. This is a picture of the church, who seeks Jesus’ lost sheep, and when found, the church holds a celebratory feast, the Lord’s Supper, wherein we feast with Christ and upon him as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Someone might say, “***If Jesus ate with sinners, why do we practice closed communion? The Orthodox Lutheran Church is acting like the Pharisees when they grumble at other churches who welcome all sinners, that is everybody, to commune with them in the Lord’s Supper***.” I reply that Jesus does not receive **all *sinners.*** He doesn’t eat with all sinners. And on the last day he will in fact shut the door in the face of some sinners saying “I do not know you”. He preaches to all sinners to be sure—calling them to repent—but he only receives and eats with ***repentant*** sinners. He only rejoices with those lost sinners who are found…that is, prepared by faith to meet the bridegroom when he comes to call.

When explaining to the Pharisees why he’s eating with these sinners, he tells parables about how, when something precious is lost and is found, a celebration and feast follows. Then he ends each with these words. “**Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”** Jesus eats with these sinners and tax collectors not just because they are sinners, but because they are sinners who have been found…meaning they have repented.

Two lessons here. First is that salvation is when God finds the lost…and that means ***when he brings sinners to repentance***. There is no joy to be had when sinners refuse to repent. When they scoff at God’s law and mock the saints who counsel fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom. There is no feast for a lost sheep that remains lost, or for a lost coin that has not been found, or for a sinner that has not repented. But God continues to seek and to save the lost, and that is worthy of celebration.

The second lesson is that the proper response to repentance is rejoicing. ***The proper response to repentance is rejoicing***. The Pharisees scold sinners, but Angels *sing* at their sorrow over sin. They sing not just at the corporate salvation of the world, but they sing when even *one* sinner repents.

I have heard some of you voice concerns about how saddening it is when there are only a few people around you at church some Sundays. I can understand the sentiment…but where is your faith? When one person repents, Jesus calls for a feast and all the angels of heaven are rejoicing? And would you lament? At the lambs high *feast*, would you *fast*? Don’t forget that you are not among the ninety-nine sheep, but you are the one in need of repentance. And when you confess you are a poor miserable sinner in need of and desireing grace…you repent. On that day, every Lord’s Day Christ has found you and inaugurated a feast for you. If you believe it, then Christ has given it to you. Don’t call defeat what Christ has declared to be Victory.

Every Sunday, we hold a feast for the lost sheep who have been found. Christ calls a feast for even one, and yet every Sunday we have more than one who come. Today there are \_\_\_\_\_\_ . Jesus says, in that case, have a feast. Even if you were the only person in the world to be saved, Christ would have died on the cross for you. Now he has a feast every Sunday to celebrate, and to give you the kingdom of God under bread and wine. May we receive this holy meal for our salvation, and to the glory of God’s Holy Name. And may we prioritize our own salvation as diligently as God does.