

Lost and Found

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: Luke 15:1-32



Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So He told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me,

for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ 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. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." ¹¹ And He said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours

came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

We have all lost something at some point: documents, money, a phone, home, love, health, memory, faith.... Yes, we know the feeling of losing something precious. Similarly, we also know the joy when what was lost can be found again. The sorrow when something is lost and the joy when what was lost is found again can be measured by the value of that which was lost. When parents lose their children, they would give everything to find the child again. All the money in the world is not worth as much as this child. That’s why most people exert themselves beyond the limits of their strength so that children can be found again. Some print it on milk cartons, release it in the newspapers, and call everyone, even everyone who has even the slightest connection to their circle of family and friends. They even let the child know through press release: “You can come back without question and without restriction. If you did something wrong, we won’t acknowledge it all anymore. We just want you!” Why do these parents do so much? It’s because the child is really of value. Most parents would also give up all their belongings, really everything they own just to see the lost child again. Because the lost child is more important than everything else.

In our sermon text for this Sunday, it’s also about such lost children. Jesus explains by means of different parables, how it is when a child of God becomes lost. And He tells us very clearly with these parables: lost children are important. And even God leaves no stone unturned to find such a child. Yes, God does even so much more than earthly parents ever could. Out of His unending power and glory, He simply gives away Himself and everything that He has. To make sure no one somehow misses this message, He has had it printed out in books and sends people to the far corners of the earth to pass it on. God wants to have His children back! He even goes so far that He simply leaves the other children, who are not considered missing, alone to find the one who is lost. As a result, we learn something very important: Lost children are important to our God! They are important to our Lord Jesus Christ! When Jesus tells these stories about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, then the story is mostly aimed at those who were of the opinion that they weren’t lost. Jesus actually wants use this message to talk with people who are already God’s children. So in our day and age, Jesus would mean the Christians by this. And the ones who are lost, are the so-called non-Christians. So what Jesus actually wants to say is that the so-called non-Christians are absolutely important! The word “non-” could also be misunderstood that non-Christians have nothing to do with Christ. According to these parables, that’s not true at all. For Christ makes especially the lost sheep and the non-Christians even more important than the Christians. Instead of talking about the non-Christians, it would be better to talk about the VIPs. In English, VIP means: very important person. In Jesus’ eyes, non-Christians are such VIPs. But we shouldn’t only call them VIPs but also treat them as such. So, roll out the red carpet. When a VIP is in the area, tell them and show them at every opportunity. You are a very special person. I think that we Christians sometimes stray exactly at this point. If we hear about non-Christians or get to know them, we sometimes shake our heads with pity or even disgust. Or we view such people as somehow morally, spiritually, or otherwise inferior. They are just not.... Christians. Honestly... would you join a community that basically considers you stupid and inferior? According to the parables Jesus gives us in Luke 15, the lost sheep, coins, or people, have only one thing in common. They are lost. This is the focus in the heavenly Father’s plan. Not what they did wrong, nor why they are even lost in the first place, nor what an endless amount of work they are for us.... No, none of that matters. Just one thing matters: They are

lost! If that's the case, then we may need to clear up one point or another in our heads. Clearing up that the lost and unimportant once again become very important. Clearing up that we don't think just about ourselves and the upgrading of our church, but rather about the lost themselves and about their eternal fate. Incidentally, our parable also shows how blessedly unaffected the heavenly Father is by the number of His flock. Yes, the story appears to go against any calculation. For the shepherd even leaves the many so that he can go after the one. And again, it's also not about the church having a lot of money. Obviously the church also needs money to live and to survive. That's constantly talked about by church committees and synods, and rightly so. But when it's about the lost, money can't be a factor. The father who waits for his lost son didn't cheerfully rub his hands together and say: "Finally the buffoon is back again with my money." No, he was just glad for his son's return. Initially, nothing else was a factor.

But Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees can also help us today on a second point. I'm talking about the question of who is actually lost. This is most clearly recognizable in the parable of the lost son. When the lost son returned, the one who remained at home was on morally stronger ground. That was very clear and undeniable. That's how he also felt about himself. The lost son, in contrast, landed in the gutter by his own fault. It's also like that for all the others. Lost sheep strayed on their own. The only catch is that no one can say of themselves that they are without guilt. In one way or another, we all qualify as guilty. So, we can't act as though we were better than others. Jesus Himself is the only One who could certainly condemn or berate the lost. But He doesn't do that. Instead, He goes in a completely different way. Instead, He just loves. Just like that, with no ifs, ands, or buts. But what do those who consider themselves to be more just and deserving do? I'm talking about the brother, for example, who stayed at home. He had evidence to prove that he had done more than his brother and also that he deserved more. But he made one big mistake. He trusted in his own accomplishment and merit. He even emphasizes these things and values his own merit over the grace of his father. In doing so, he tramples the love and mercy of his father. By only trusting in himself and elevating himself over his brother, he actually leaves the flock himself. He himself becomes a lost sheep.

And God also searches for people like this brother. He spares nothing. He searches for those who have strayed in their self-righteousness, as well as those who have clearly landed in the gutter. Jesus makes no distinctions. He searches for them both. And He does that with every single one of us. The Shepherd finds the sheep. He binds its injuries and gives it fresh water and food so it doesn't thirst or hunger. The sheep experiences the care and security it needs. This is announced anew every Sunday in our church. For there, we all come forward and receive the forgiveness of sins. Everyone needs it because everyone, in their own way, has gotten lost again.

Also this morning, God is again on the search. He seeks you when you don't know Him or you have forgotten Him or have run away like a sheep that has lost the flock. The very fact that you are here and listening to this sermon is a sign of God's search for you. God seeks you. He wants to find you. He has found you. And actually Jesus says just one thing: Come to Me. He says nothing else but that. Come to Me. It is the only thing that counts. Imagine a sheep that was lost and when found by the shepherd, then bleats: Thanks, you can go now – nice of you to come here after me, but it wasn't necessary. That would be a joke and a slap in the shepherd's face. In this respect, you should make no jokes this morning. God finds us. God is seeking us. And how beautiful it is when we know that He has found us. A reason to celebrate. Yes, and we do exactly that today.

Yes, dear Lord Jesus, You have found me. Now I would also like to stay with You. My whole life long. And that's ultimately what it's all about.

Hearing the words of the Lord Jesus and staying with Him is the most important thing in our life. And when you are weakened or challenged or in doubt for whatever reasons, just one thing counts: "Come." We want to write "COME" in all caps today in our church. There is also nothing more we need to do. The word "Come" applies to us all... We all are VIPs in God's eyes. We all will be gathered into His arms with a great song of joy. Come! Amen.