

Sunday, July 10, 2022

A Valuing Community

(Series: "Stories of Jesus" – The Lost Coin)
(Message Four)
(Luke 15:8-10)

Scripture

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 'And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:8-10)

Message:

Have you ever been the recipient of a surprise birthday party?

You might have indicated you weren't interested in a party – just a quiet dinner with family, but they didn't listen. And, in retrospect, you should have figured it out.

You'd walk into the room and the conversation would stop. For the first time, they were all uncharacteristically prompt. There was no discussion about where to go eat, they were all in agreement - that never happened. Then you walk in and "surprise!" They knew what you didn't. *They made every effort to make sure you didn't miss it.* They wanted you to celebrate and they wanted to be there to celebrate with you.

Jesus does the same for us. He knows about the "party!" The eternal "party!"

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories. Each one talks about something lost and something found: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and two lost sons.

In introducing these three stories, Luke notes three primary "actors" - the Pharisees (representing the religious found), sinners (representing the irreligious lost) and Jesus.

In the first story, we have the ninety-nine, the lost sheep, and the shepherd. In our story today, we have the **nine** unlost coins, **one** lost coin, and the **woman**. In the last story, we have an older son, a prodigal son, and the father. They are the found, the lost, and the one who seeks until he/she finds the lost and brings them home.

This story, like many Jesus tells, is set up on a seven-step outline:

Introduction (A), **Lost** (B), **Found** (C), **Rejoice** (D), Found (C), Lost (B), and Conclusion (A).

Again, the focus is in the center – D. This time the focus is on **rejoicing!**

Again, the listener or reader is invited and expected to reflect on the stories.

Again, all three players are on stage, but all three are mute. Neither the sheep (in the first parable) nor the coin (in today's parable) say anything.

THE STORY

Introduction: *"What woman, having ten silver coins..."*

In this story, Jesus again rejects the pharisaic attitudes. In the first story it was their labeling proscribed shepherds; in this story, it is their perceived inferiority of **women**.

Using a woman, instead of a man, is in keeping with Jesus' teaching his followers (both men and women) that men and women are both full participants in his kingdom. Luke continually balances Jesus' teaching; his previous story dealt with a (male) shepherd; this one focuses on a woman. He always offers an example of male and female: e.g., Zechariah Song/Mary Song, Simeon/Anna, raising a dead man (7:1-17) and a dead woman (8:49-56).

In **Luke 15, 8-10**, Jesus compares himself to the woman who is the hero in this story. While all of this is significant and should be noted, it is not the focus of the story.

In our first story, the shepherd has one hundred sheep; the lost is one in a hundred. In this story the woman has ten coins, the loss is one in ten. So the **value** of the "lost" has **increased** tenfold (from one in one hundred to one in ten).

Lost. *"...loses one [coin]..."* (The value and purpose of the coin is often debated)

Some see in this parable a contrast to the lost sheep parable and suggest the shepherd was **rich** (he had one hundred sheep!) and this woman was **poor** (she had a mere ten coins). A man with a hundred sheep would be considered well off, but the shepherd is seldom the owner of the sheep (and its usually not a high paying job).

But the woman in our story is not all that poor; she has ten coins. Turning this into a rich-poor contrast distorts the focus of this parable.

The actual value of the "coin," a Greek drachma, 4.3 grams of silver, is also debated. Some believe the coin is of **little value** (worth about a quarter). Most think it equals a **day's wages**. Ten days of wages is an average paycheck today.

Regardless, the relative value has increased dramatically. From one in one hundred to one in ten. And the **full value** of the coin may surpass its simple

monetary worth.

Some believe the coin was part of the woman's **dowry**. The coins were pierced and hanging from the woman's veil as part of the marriage arrangement. But that was for Bedouin women - not village women. And the location of this story is a house, not a tent; and the discovery of pierced coins has been extremely rare.

Ray Stedman, a well-known expository preacher, found the practice of a bride contributing a small dowry to the wedding costs far more sensible than the western practice of the bride's family covering (all) the cost. He had four daughters. ☺

Some believe the coins were used in jewelry, like a **necklace**. Middle Eastern peasant women often carried their worldly wealth around in gold or silver coins fastened to a chain around their neck - referred to as a "*woman's bank*." Obviously, the beauty of the whole is diminished when one is missing. The loss is more than the value of a single coin. The entire necklace has lost value. Likewise, the whole *community* is impacted, diminished, when even one is missing.

Others suggest the listener would assume her husband had entrusted the coins to her for the household's **daily expenses**. The flow of the story leans toward this understanding.

A wife was often entrusted with a relatively significant amount of money to provide for a modest family. She takes full responsible for the money...and its loss. She's more responsible for the loss of her coin than the shepherd is for his lost sheep.

The shepherd could be excused; he had one hundred sheep; sheep tend to wander; and the wilderness is vast! The shepherd could blame a variety of things.

By contrast, the woman has ten coins; coins seldom wander; and the home is small. She has no one to blame but herself. She takes responsibility: "*Why wasn't I more careful?*" She is remorseful about her carelessness.

The storyteller is likening humankind to the **lost, lifeless coin** lost on the dark floor.

This story should give us **pause** – as parents, as leaders, as followers of Jesus.

Think of our children. The heartache and pain are unbearable should we lose one. Sometimes, like sheep, they wander; they have a mind of their own. Or like the coin, it may be the result of parental carelessness and lack of attentiveness.

Think of the church. The heartache of seeing someone wandering away. Sometimes, like sheep, they just wander; they have a mind of their own. Sometimes, like the coin, it is the result of our carelessness, thoughtless decisions.

Think of our community. The heartache of knowing someone doesn't know Jesus. Sometimes it is because they are hard hearted; sometimes it is because we never shared the Gospel with them, never showed the sacrificial love to them Jesus showed to us, never invited them to follow Jesus.

Heaven forbids we should lose even one, but little time is given in these stories to the blame game. It is not helpful. It is a waste of time. The focus is on the search, on finding and restoring the lost – regardless of the personal cost.

Found. “...until she finds it, she lights a lamp, sweeps the house, seeks diligently...”

In Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the city Jesus called “home” during his ministry, the Franciscans have worked hard excavating the ancient city. They’ve discovered the site consists almost exclusively of black basalt rock (The synagogue, constructed of white limestone, is one of the villages very few exceptions.)

A typical home was about the size of a one stall garage, with six-inch-high windows (i.e., little more than slits) typically found about seven feet off the ground near the roof. The floors were covered with flat basalt stones taken from the lake. Cracks between the stones were often wide.

The storyteller pictures a woman in a small room with walls, floor and ceiling of black stone and small windows – an easy place for a small coin to “**disappear.**”

She accepts **responsibility** for losing the coin (something the shepherd refused to do) and her diligent **response** in searching for the coin is spelled out with great detail: she lights a lamp; she sweeps the house; she searches diligently.

Without moralizing this or making simple platitudes, think about this for a moment.

First, she **lights a lamp**. Even in broad daylight – because homes were dark inside (primarily sleeping quarters)– she would need a lamp. She cannot work in darkness; she needs light.

Jesus is the light of the world; Scripture is a light on our path. Parents, leaders, followers, need to be in the Word; we all need *light* to live well in this world.

Second, she **sweeps the house**. A fallen coin would be incredibly difficult to find in a dark house with plenty of crevices between the rocks (it is an archeologist’s delight).

Cleaning, self-examination, confession (admitting our responsibility), is an essential part of redeeming the lost. Like the woman, we need to admit when we’re wrong (leaders and followers, parents and children). Life is a journey.

How often do you heard a leader say, *"I messed up. I was wrong! I'm sorry!"*

She **searches diligently**. She's intentional. She thinks it through. She engages the task. She makes it a priority (not an afterthought). She follows through to the end.

We need to focus on spiritual things more than the distractions of this world. We need to prioritize our relationship with Jesus as he prioritizes his relationship with us.

While the focus of the shepherd story is **restoration**; the focus of this story is the **cost** of the search. **Grace**, while freely offered, is always **costly** to the one who provides it.

Once the sheep is found, the shepherd must pay the price (carrying the sheep home after the find). But the price here is paid in the **search**. She searches until she finds the coin. She knows if she doesn't search, it will be lost forever. The coin will not **find itself**, nor will the coin cooperate in the search ("Hey, I'm over here. You're getting warm..."). When the coin is found, it too is restored; the theme of **atonement** is **unmistakable**.

So **why** does this woman search? It is "just" a coin; it is just a sinner or tax collector.

If the **necklace** theory is followed, the answer is this jewelry has sentimental value. She **loves** it. Its beauty is significantly damaged if a part is missing. She goes after it because she loves it.

If it's the household **cash**, the affirmation of her **integrity** becomes the primary theme:

"I have lost a day's wages. I have not been out since I last knew I had it; so it must be in the house. I'll find it. I'm always a good steward of our resources. This is who I am. I will find the lost drachma."

This reason reflects the *"for his own name's sake"* of **Psalm 23** and the holiness theme of **Ezekiel 36:22-23**. It is (again) focused on the King of the kingdom.

She searches because **finding** is all but **assured** in this story if one searches diligently. Since the focus of the search is more narrowly defined (a house, not a wide wilderness) the assurance of success is intensified – solely dependent on the effort put into the search.

While the odds of finding the lost sheep uninjured, undevoured in the wild is small, the coin can be found if sufficient effort is extended – more light, more sweeping, more searching. Our hope and assurance of finding the lost is only dependent on the intensity of the search; and this woman is determined not stop until the lost is found.

In the seeking, the shepherd represented Jesus in the first story; here the

woman does. She searches because **Jesus searches**.

Rejoice. *"When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors, 'Rejoice with me...'"*

The woman shares her joy and affirms her **integrity** in a **community** setting. Her situation is different from the shepherds. The friends and neighbors of the shepherd knew he lost a sheep because he didn't return to the village at the accustomed time and then he only returned with one sheep.

The neighbors don't know the woman lost a coin. If it were a part of a necklace, they might eventually notice; but if a day's wages were lost, they would not. In a traditional village society, wealth is hidden, not displayed, talked or bragged about. That tradition of secrecy is woven into this story.

The woman doesn't tell them, *"I had ten coins and I lost one."* She invites her neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found a coin that was lost.

She could have kept the entire event a secret; **maintained** her **dignity**. Sheep tend to wander off on their own. Coins seldom do. Calling a party to celebrate her find means admitting fault in the loss; this also affirms her integrity. The joy she experiences when finding the coin overshadows everything. She invites her friends to hear her story. The party is held in her honor.

The joy of the neighbors over the coin found is a mirror of the joy of heaven over a found/repentant sinner.

When we light, sweep, and search, the **lost get found**. The proof is right here in this story. And when the lost get found - when a child professes their faith, an adult baptism occurs, when one who left the church comes back - a celebration ensues! It must!

It doesn't get any better! Heaven **rejoices** us with us! The main thing remains the main thing.

Found. *"I have found my coin..."*

The lost sinners Jesus was receiving (including the tax collectors) were in the house of **Israel** (God's people), not a **far country** (Gentiles). They were part of the "wealth" of the nation and could be found. If Jesus' critics (*the Pharisees and teachers of the law*) would (simply) seek diligently, they too could find the lost.

*Our actions on the **keyboard** of earth trigger hammers on the piano **strings** of heaven. Our obedience pulls the ropes which ring the bells in heaven's belfries.*

Lost. *"...which was lost."*

The coin has an **intrinsic**, undiminished **value** in this parable (like the tax collector and sinner) - that emphasis is unique to this parable. A crisp, new

\$100 bill is worth \$100. So is a folded, stomped on, dirty \$100 bill. Likewise, the intrinsic value of this coin is undiminished – even if it is lost.

The sheep may have been wounded, injured, their wool damaged; that would **reduce** their value. The prodigal (next story) squandered his inheritance (less value). But the coin **loses nothing** of its value by being lost.

Sadly, in human terms, people (society) almost universally consider the “lost” **worthless** and often “the lost” consider themselves worthless. They are not! This parable adamantly **refutes** that assumption.

At the sinking of the RMS Titanic, over twenty-two hundred people were cast into the frigid waters of the Atlantic. On the shore the names of the passengers were posted in two simple columns: saved (found) and lost.

God’s list is equally simple. There are only two places to be: lost or found. When one is found, celebrate! When one lags in their response, urge him/her to get ready. *You know what they do not yet know.* We must make every effort to make sure **they** know what **we** know, make sure they don’t miss the celebration, and make every effort to enjoy the celebration with them!

Conclusion: *“There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Jesus is saying, *“The angels of heaven rejoice when a sinner is found; if heaven is rejoicing, what is **holding you back?**”*

May we experience the joy described in this parable when the lost we know and love are eternally **found** and **restored** by Jesus. May it be a community we value with all our heart!

Prayer:

Father, thank you for sending Jesus to search for us until he found us; thank you that he found us through no effort of our own; and thank you for the opportunity to know the joy of being eternally found.

Father, open our eyes to the plight of lost coins in the cracks of the rocks and crevices of life. Call us to light lamps, sweep homes, and search for those who are lost. Use us in the building of your Kingdom.

In the name of Jesus our Teacher and Rabbi, Amen.