

Joy over the Found

Luke 15:1-10

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 11, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

As many of you know I lost the congregation's iPad several weeks ago. I searched and searched for it. I have a bad habit of putting something down while I do something else and then forgetting the thing that I put down because I am too busy thinking about the thing that I was doing that made it necessary to put the thing down that I lost. I wondered maybe if I had done that with the iPad. I searched all over the sanctuary. I searched through the sacristy. I searched through my study. I looked in my bag, in the filing cabinet. Finally, I began to look in places that I thought were unlikely. I looked in the parish hall among the Bibles. I looked in the congregation's kitchen. I looked through the books in the library. Finally I was looking in the balcony searching in the piano benches and looking through the congregation's chapel. I looked in places where I knew it would not be because the places where I thought it should be I had searched three times.

Finally, I had to enlist the help of others. People helped me search through the lectern and the pulpit and the sanctuary again. The altar guild helped me look through the sacristy and the vestry again. People suggested different places that I might look that I had not thought of. Loretta put it on the congregation's facebook page that it was missing and finally she and others asked me to make an announcement on Sunday to see if anyone knew where it was.

Sunday came and went and Loretta asked me if I had made the announcement. I said no. She wanted to know why not and I said, "Because then I would have to admit that I had lost it."

Now imagine my joy if I had found the congregation's iPad. And imagine my joy if I had found the iPad without any of you finding out that I had lost it in the first place. That is the kind of joy that God experiences in heaven upon one sinner repenting.

If I had found that iPad, I would have been happier with the iPad and paid more attention to the iPad than if I had never lost the iPad to begin with. That is the kind of joy that the angels have before God over one sinner repenting.

The woman who lost coin has lost a coin that is worth a days wages for a common laborman. That means that her husband is a common laborman in the Roman Empire. She and her husband are poor. Now try to imagine yourself being poor. Imagine having no savings because each and every one of your paychecks goes to rent and groceries and basic insurance every year. You do not own a car because you cannot afford it. You do not have cable or satellite television because you cannot afford it. You have a TV set and watch the broadcast channels. You have no reserve cash. Now imagine losing \$80 in that situation. That is devastating. You need that \$80. Sure there is \$720 that you did not lose, but that will not cover all of your expenses for the month. Without that \$80 you are going to have to do without something. You are going to have to do without food or clothing or something. You will still need to pay the rent and have enough to pay the toll to the bus unless you start leaving early to walk to work.

There is a great relief when that woman finds her lost coin. There is great relief when they find that \$80. That is the joy over one sinner repenting. That is the joy of the man who found his lost sheep. That is the kind of joy that God has when He finds you.

Now try not to get bogged down in the details of the parables.

It is likely that the woman lost her coin due to negligence. I certainly lost the congregation's iPad due to my negligence. The man who lost his sheep may have lost it to negligence, but in his case it is more likely that the sheep wandered off on its own.

God did not lose sinners due to His negligence. It is not like we became sinners because He failed to provide for us. It is not like we became sinners because He failed in His god duties somehow. It is not like when God made us that there was some kind of built in fault that led us to sin against Him. He made us perfect in the beginning. There was no negligence on His part. Nor was there some flaw in the creation that led us into sin. His creation was perfect. We were the ones who went astray.

Our Lord tells the parable of the sheep so that we may understand that it is our responsibility that has led us to be lost. We got lost. We wandered from Him. We left Him.

Our Lord also tells the parable of the sheep to convey to us that our lives are at stake. When a child wanders from its parent, the child's life is at stake. The child could die or get kidnapped or become injured. Without the parent there to keep watch all kinds of bad things could happen to that child. Thus also when we wandered from our Father in heaven we encountered death. We encountered a death unlike any that we expected. We encountered a death that severed our soul from our body and cast them both into hell even after the resurrection. We encountered a death that not only ended our life at the end of our life, but it brought pain and suffering with it. In other words we don't simply just live and live and live and then stop. As soon as we wandered into death and death had a hold on us, death brought with it the decay into our lives necessary in order for us to die. In other words there are causes of death and as soon as we wandered into death we wandered into the causes of death. We wandered off into sickness and accidents and suffering and decay. Everything that we suffer no matter how small is because we have wandered off into sin and death. Like the sheep on its own in the wilderness it will suffer and die unless its owner finds it.

Our Lord tells the parable of the coin to convey to us the joy that God and the angels have over one sinner repenting. When our Lord tells the parable of the sheep there are one hundred of them. You might get bogged down in the details of the parable and say to yourself, "Well, there are ninety-nine others who did not wander off. How much joy can he really have when there was not that much at stake in terms of loss?" That is why our Lord tells the parable of the coin so that you can understand what a loss it is to God to lose one of His creatures. That is why there is joy when only one sinner repents. There is more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

Now don't get bogged down in the details.

Some of you have pointed out that there are not ninety-nine righteous people in the whole human race. You have rightly pointed out that all of them are sinners. Like the Lord does not know that. Jesus is posing a hypothetical.

Let us assume that there were ninety-nine righteous people. These people would have never wandered away from God. These people never would have lost their original righteousness. These people never would have sinned ever in their lives. They would have perfectly loved God above all things and they would have perfectly loved their neighbors as themselves. Like Jesus, they would have made the right decisions all of the time. They would have done godliness and refrained from wickedness. Imagine such people! As a result none of them would be afflicted with the decay that leads to death. None of them would get sick. None of them would die.

Now God is happier with you repenting than He is if there had been ninety-nine such righteous people who do not need to repent. Let me say that again. God is happier with you repenting than He is if there had been ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

God is relieved when He finds you and relief is the best emotion of them all. God is happier when He goes looking for you and finds you than He would have been had you never gone missing at all. God is happier when He finds you after looking for you than He would have been had He never had to go looking for you at all.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.