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Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

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Luke 15:1-10

### **“One out of One Hundred”**

Do you remember your first experience of being lost?

I can remember going downtown with my mother to a marketplace as a preschooler and getting lost. Someone found me and brought me to a room in the police office for lost children. I thought I never see my mother again. I felt scared. But, she found me. I still remember that scared of being lost and the joy and relief of that reunion of being found. After that happening, I have trauma to lose my way. I often lost my way and feel scared. So, when I go somewhere, I always keep GPS to find a way because I could not expect my mom to find me as an adult.

I am sure you have similar memories, scaring or traumas like I have. Perhaps you have been hopelessly lost as an adult. We have all lived through those traumatic experiences of being lost and being found. The most painful experience of being lost is, perhaps nobody tries to find me who am lost. And then anybody no more remembers me who am lost. If it happens like that, it is probably, excruciating.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read two stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin. These stories Jesus offers are to respond to the persistent grumbling of the Pharisees and the scribes. The Pharisees and the scribes do not like Jesus, who “welcomes sinners and eats with them.” They thought that if Jesus is the good rabbi (teacher), he should be with them who are the Pharisees and the scribes, rather than with sinners. However, Jesus looks like not to welcome the Pharisees and the scribes, and then they feel jealous. Pharisees and scribes thought they are righteous people who are reserved heaven, the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells them that these parable stories are not a judgment to the grumblers, but the good news to them. These memorable stories are about the divine mercy of God and the unbounded joy of God when the lost are found. The issue is, however, who the lost is in the text.

Who is the lost one in the context? Do you think that the lost are the sinners or the Pharisees and the scribes? There is a similar situation in the Gospel of Luke 2:16-17. When the Pharisees and the scribes saw that Jesus eats with sinners, they asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus heard them, and said to them, “those who well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” So, they might think that 'aha, that’s why Jesus is eating with sinners.’

Now, it comes up with a similar situation again. The Pharisees and the scribes are still grumbling, 'why Jesus is welcoming and eating with sinners?' Jesus tells them these parable stories of lost and found as a response to them.

What do these two stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin tell us? These two stories have an obvious common point, which is the compassionate concern of a searching God. The shepherd has a risk temporarily abandoning the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness and goes looking for one sheep out of one hundred. For the shepherd, the hundred sheep are more important than one sheep. Even though he has a risk to lose ninety-nine, he chooses to look for the lost one.

The woman who lost a coin is described as lighting a lamp and taking a broom in hand in her attempt to recover her missing coin. Neither the shepherd nor the woman has a moment's hesitation as to what to do. Neither forsakes the search until the sheep/coin is found. Such searching gives value to those being sought. They become treasured and significant because they are not left for lost, but are made the objects of divine concern.

The other thing we can find from these stories is that of the heavenly delight in the recovery of the lost. The shepherd and the woman overcome the risk and the difficulties of their search. And they call their friends and neighbors to come to a party. It perhaps spends cost more than one sheep or one coin to celebrate. The

reason they do so is that we may find in the conclusion of these stories. The narrator indeed makes a point of speaking of the heavenly joy “over one sinner who repents” (15:7, 10) as a conclusion of these stories. However, we know that sheep and coin cannot repent.

So, what is the point of Jesus? We should remember that these stories are for responding to the Pharisees and the scribes. Shepherd and women are the undersides of Jewish society as second-class citizens. However, Jesus begins, “which one of you, having a hundred sheep...?” (15:4). They are asked to reflect on their own experiences of losing a valuable thing, of the search, and of the delight in finding it. By association, they are invited to share with God and angelic host in the celebration over the reclaiming of a lost sinner. In answer to the complaint that Jesus has overstepped the boundaries in having table fellowship with sinners, the parables implicitly beckon the Pharisees and the scribes to join him, to be a part of the searching because God is a searching God. Here is the good news. God is searching lost one beyond our thoughts.

We might think that we are not like sinners. We might think that God is searching for the lost one, who is out of one hundred. We might think that we are staying in the group of ninety- nine as the Pharisees and the scribes thought of themselves. However, Jesus tells to them, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance” (5:32). And he says about the heavenly joy “over one

sinner who repents” (15:7, 10). Whether you think you are the lost one or the one abiding in God, God is searching for us, who is the one out of one hundred. This is the good news for all who repent and return to God.

The moment I was lost remains as a trauma. The moment I was found also remains as the joy of reunion in my memories. I really appreciated my mother, who found me, not left me alone. I trust that God is searching for me more than my mother was searching for me. God might be searching for me and holding me with more efforts and risks than before because God loves you much more than one out of one hundred sheep.

I want to share with you a Jewish story before I conclude my sermon: There was a farmer who works sincerely. So, God wanted to reward him and asked him for three wishes. But, there was the condition; if you wish anything, that wish would be given double to your neighbor. Therefore, the farmer wanted one hundred cattle, and his neighbor got two hundred. The farmer wished for a hundred acres of land, and his neighbor got two hundred acres of land. The farmer could not be happy. Instead, he felt jealous of his neighbor. Finally, he wished God to be blind in one eye. It is a too painful story.

We are the one out of one hundred, who God is still searching for. This means that we are valuable for God, never left us alone as forgotten. The parable of the

lost sheep and the lost coin expose the grumbling spirit that prevents us from receiving God's mercy and grace. Only those who can celebrate God's grace with others can experience that mercy themselves. Remember, the grace of God is endless. Let us join God searching for the lost so we may experience the heavenly joy. **Thanks be to God, Amen!**