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Luke 15:1-10

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I wonder if the sheep in Jesus' parable knew that it was lost.

- The coin, obviously, didn't know that it was lost,

- it's a coin, - -

- but I wonder if the sheep knew -

- I wonder if the sheep was just happily eating grass,

- walking along,

- oblivious to the fact that it was all alone -

- or if it was actively

- trying to find its way back to the rest of the herd -

- trying to find its way back to the shepherd.

- Jesus,

- as you know,

- doesn't give us that level of detail

- about the state of the sheep who is lost -

- Jesus doesn't seem all that concerned about

- whether the sheep carelessly wandered away,

- or chose to leave the flock for some reason, - -

- There is no blaming the sheep for wandering away,

- for not paying attention to its surroundings

- or for deciding to explore somewhere new and exciting.
- Jesus chooses instead
 - to focus on the shepherd -
 - to focus on the relentless determination
 - of the one who is searching
 - and on the joy that is felt -
 - when that lost sheep is found -
- Now I realize that focusing on the shepherd, - - not the sheep,
 - may seem like an inconsequential detail at first,
 - but I tend to believe that
 - Jesus is very intentional and precise in his choice of words -
 - tend to believe that Jesus doesn't just randomly
 - pick his storytelling perspective,
 - but instead has given real thought
 - to the details of the parable
 - choosing his words,
 - choosing his approach
 - to reinforce and strengthen
 - the lesson he is teaching. - -
- So I don't think it is an accident -
 - that these two parables of the lost,
 - spend more time focusing on the one who is doing the searching

- than on the sheep and the coin that are missing, - -
- for by focusing on the one who is searching -
- Jesus is able to teach us something -
- powerful about God
- and God's love for God's people.
- Let's face it -
- there are times in all our lives when we feel lost - -
- We might be having a difficult time at work or at school, - - -
- struggling to keep up -
- or to the accomplish the task we have been given. -
- We might have reached this point in pandemic life -
- and realized we weren't exactly sure
- what we should do next -
- or which is the right path to follow -
- or which option we should pursue. - -
- We might face conflict or distance in our relationships -
- feeling disconnected from our family -
- or our friends -
- or our God. - -
- We might have moments where the pain and violence of the world,
- leave us with questions about who God is,
- where God is,

- and how God is engaging in the world

- that God loves?

And sometimes in those moments,

- my sense is that we almost don't really grasp that we are lost. -

- We were just living our lives -

- going through the motion day after day -

- and then one day we look up -

- and we don't recognize where we are,

- who we are, -

- or how we reached that point. - -

- And at other times,

- my sense is that we know we have made a very intentional choice -

- to move in a new direction -

- to try something different -

- to leave the flock behind -

- only to discover -

- that the flock we were a part of

- wasn't so bad after all, - - -

- only to discover that

- having a shepherd

- to be with us and support us

- can be a good thing. - -

- Now the temptation,
 - I think when we realize that we are lost, -
 - in our “do it ourselves”
 - stand on our own
 - individualistic world -
 - is to believe that-
 - the only way we can overcome our “lostness”
 - is to **find our own way home.** -
 - The temptation is to think, - - -
 - I got myself lost. -
 - I dug my hole. -
 - I left the shepherd behind, - - -
 - so I have to fix this myself
 - because the shepherd is not coming after me -
 - not going to chase down the one
 - who got themselves lost, -
 - who wandered away, -
 - especially since there are plenty of other sheep
 - who need tending. - -
- That’s the temptation
 - to believe that we aren’t worthy to be found, -
 - that no one would notice our absence

- or care enough to come and find us,
- But as we can see in our parable today -
- the one who searches -
- isn't terribly concerned about
- how we got lost. -
- The one who searches
- isn't terribly concerned about -
- where we have been or what we have done -
- while we were lost. -
- The one who searches
- isn't terribly concerned about
- whether or not we feel like
- we deserve to be found. - -
- No, - -
- Our God,
- who loves us completely, -
- who promises to never abandon us, -
- is willing to search for us -
- even if we have no idea
- that we need to be found, - -
- just like that woman
- who is searching for her lost coin. -

- Our God,

- who loves us completely, -

- who will never abandon us, -

- is willing to search for us -

- even when we are still trying to run away -

- convinced that we don't need the shepherd.

- Our God,

- who loves us completely, -

- who will never abandon us, -

- is willing to search for us -

- through the darkness and the muck

- through the hurt and the pain, - - -

- ready to scoop us up,

- and carry us home.

- Because no matter what has happened, -

- no matter how lost we may have become, - -

- no matter where we may have gone, - -

- we are now,

- and always will be, -

- God's beloved, valuable children. - -

No matter what has happened -

- no matter how lost we may have become, -

- no matter where we may have gone, - -

- God will never abandon us,

- will never turn away from us -

- will never withhold God's gracious forgiveness and mercy

No matter what has happened, -

- no matter how lost we may have become, -

- no matter where we may have gone, - -

- there is nothing that will cause God to say - - -

- You aren't worth my time. -

- Or - You aren't worth the search. - -

- Because as a child of God, -

- You are valuable to God. -

- You are worthy of love.

- You are always a part of God's family of faith.

- Which is why -

- the parable doesn't simply include the willingness to search

- for the lost,

- but also includes the joy that is felt -

- when the one who is lost -

- is finally found.

- Please notice - -

- There is no scolding the sheep for getting lost.

- There is no harsh punishment for wandering away.
- There are no dire consequences imposed
 - for being separated from the flock. - -
- There is simply joy, reconciliation and an invitation to a new beginning. -
- Joy that in the midst of a confusing, imperfect world, -
 - that one who was lost
 - has been found. - -
- Reconciliation, -
 - a willingness to welcome back the one who has been lost, -
 - to reunite the one into the family, -
 - to offer forgiveness - - -
- and an Invitation to a new beginning - -
 - an invitation for the one who was lost -
 - to reconnect with the shepherd and the flock -
 - and to discover a new, healthier way forward.
- Now I know we call the passages that we read today from Luke
 - the Parable of the Lost Sheep
 - and the Parable of the Lost Coin,
 - but to my way of thinking - -
 - we really should refer to them
 - as the Parables of the Tireless Searcher, -
 - because that's the good news we hear today -

- the good news that -

- God will never give up on God's people,

- and that -

- no matter where we may have wandered,

- God will always be willing to love us,

- to forgive us,

- and to carry us home. -