September 12, 2004
Pentecost 15C-Proper 19

Jesus tells two stories today.
The first is about a lost sheep.

I know in this room there are a lot of animal lovers.

Anyone who has owned an animal knows how you develop an emotional attachment.

Sue and I have always had a dog.
The last 3 or 4 have been black
labrador retrievers..
they run fast!

Our first lab was named JACKSON.

Jackson was a great dog and very easy going, EXCEPT, he loved to run away.
And when he did, he would stand in the yard and look at you…
until you tried to get him…
then he would take off!

You could almost hear him laughing at you as we would try to catch him.

Because he loved to get away and would take off every chance he got…
we had to be very careful to
always be sure the screen door was
closed in the summer.

One day we were sitting in the living room and some said,"Where's Jackson?"

Jackson was gone!

The screen door was partially open and he had obviously taken off.

Anyone who's ever lost a pet knows what it feels like.

All of a sudden the one on the outside becomes the top priority.

It's not even connected to their behavior.

You forget what they did the day before on the rug…
or the furniture they chewed up.

The priority is in verse 4 of the gospel…
You leave the ninety-nine that were
where they are supposed to be,
and you go after the one that's lost.

All of us - 10:30 at night - took off.

Sue and I in different cars, the kids going from yard to yard up the street.

We didn't care what people were thinking. My head was out the window shouting, "JACKSON!"

When do you quit looking?
We were panicked.

The dog was not used to the street and would surely be hit.

We were all over the neighborhood.
We finally reached a point of resignation and came home.

We just sat there in the living room,
beside ourselves.

But notice in this passage,
the Good Shepherd, the Good God,
doesn't quit until he finds what is lost.
He never quits looking!

What a God!

What we see in this story are the different priorities between the religious folk,
the Pharisees… and Jesus.
Jesus, who is demonstrating God's
priority.

The Pharisees have really gotten a bad rap because the Pharisees were lay people.

They were non-professionals who cared deeply about God.

They felt that all of life should come under the law of God.

They were against the separation of church and state.

God is God and everything on planet
Earth should be under the law of God.

I want to be honest. I would probably have been a part of the Pharisees.

They were the purists.
They were a movement that was a
reaction to the watered down,
institutional religion of the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the educated, professional priests who had been polluted by materialism and the culture around them.

The Pharisees focused on rules and laws.

They thought that knowing the LAW was the same as knowing God.

Because they were focused on rules and laws and knew the Scriptures inside out,
they focused only on the righteous
people.

In other words, they believed that God rejoices in those who keep the law…
And condemns those who don't.

They believed that the angels in heaven strike up the band for those who are obedient.

But, when did angels in heaven strike up the band?

Is it for the ninety-nine who are keeping the law?
No, the music plays when one repents
who is not where they are supposed to
be.

They focused on rules and laws.
Jesus focused on knowing God and
loving people.

Jesus said,
"*You all cling to the letter of the law*
while you miss the meaning of scripture
as a whole.
And the meaning of scripture as a
whole is to love God and grab
people."

There is no rejoicing over the ninety-nine who are doing what they're supposed to be doing.

There's rejoicing in heaven over the one who repents.

That's hard to hear if you think of yourself as one of the 99…
who are where you are supposed to be.

About 12:30 that night we heard scratching at the back door and Jackson came in.
We forgot that he had chewed up the chair.

There was rejoicing for the one who was on the outside had now found his way back home.

Turn Everything Upside Down!

Here is the second story,
the story of a lost coin.

In verse eight, a woman had ten silver coins.

She lost one and literally stopped everything and turned the house upside down to find the one coin.

Who hasn't had the experience of losing your car keys?

You have to be someplace in a half-hour and you look where the keys always are.
Where are my keys

Everything stops!

I'm upstairs looking through my closet, thinking what pants did I wear yesterday.

Then I go downstairs to the coat rack,
Thinking…
what coat did I wear yesterday.

Everything stops.

This is the gospel!

God is a God who turns everything upside down seeking lost people with an obsessive passion.

In this story of the ten coins, this lady literally begins to dig up the floor.

They had dirt floors so this woman had the shovel out and was digging up the floor looking for this silver coin.

She has nine more.
It's going to cost her more tearing up
her house than the value of one coin,
so what's the big deal?

In the Middle Eastern culture little girls would save ten silver coins of this same type.

When they were married they would sew those ten coins into their headdress.

Have you ever seen Middle Eastern women
with coins hanging down over their eyes on a headdress?

It is a symbol that they are married.

So to lose one of those coins would be like losing your wedding ring.

There is no monetary value you could place on my wedding ring.

It has been on my finger for 29 years –
taken off only once to have it resized.
I'd tear down my house to find this wedding
ring.

But there is a deeper significance to this story.

A wedding ring is about covenant and…
Losing it would feel like a
violation of the marriage covenant.

Well, to God, when someone is lost, it feels like a violation of HIS covenant with humanity…
He has to be found!

Think about this for a minute.

For God so loved…Americans?
For God so loved…Christians?

No, for God so loved the world that God sent his only son.

And God's not willing that ANY should perish.

How many is any?
Does that mean NONE?

God is not willing that any should perish but that all come to life in him.

Not only that, but the scripture following this says that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world may be saved
through him.

The value of that one coin is about God's covenant, and
that God didn't create throwaways.

Everyone is included and God doesn't rest until everyone is at the party.

Look at what Jesus demonstrates,
look at the people that Jesus hung out
with.
Jesus was the holiest person who ever lived,
yet it was the prostitutes, the thieves,
and the diseased who loved him and
the religious folks who hated him.

The Son of God visited planet Earth and the
chief complaint about him was that he wasn't religious enough!

He redefined what it meant to be an important person.
He was totally counter to the culture of
his time.

You know the Pharisees were serious about God.
For example, they knew lust was a bad thing.

But they thought that lust came from the outside and they didn't understand that it was a condition of the heart.

Let me tell you how far they took it…

There was a group of Pharisees called

‘the bloodied and the bruised.’

They didn't want to lust, so when they walked down the street and saw a woman,
they would close their eyes until they
walked past the woman.

Do you see why they called them ‘bloody and bruised?’

After they bounced off three or four walls,
they opened their eyes and there stood
Jesus talking to a prostitute.

Jesus redefined what it meant to be an important person.
No one is insignificant.

He broke the rules of the culture.
This guy touched the lepers!

Because he wasn't committed to rules and
regulations,

he was committed to God and had
compassion for people.

He held children on his lap.
He talked to women of ill repute.

God is extravagantly in love with all people,
Everyone is Someone to God.

But religious people didn't get it.

In the first story of the lost sheep, God identifies with the shepherd.

Notice, the shepherd did all the work, didn’t he?
Seeking, finding, carrying, rejoicing.

What did the sheep do but wander off?

And in the lost coin story, who does God identify with?
The woman? Probably a poor woman?

The woman did all the work in the story…
Lighting the place, sweeping,
searching carefully, digging,
finding and rejoicing

The story makes clear that this God of ours will stop at nothing to find those who are lost and bring them back to him.

The question is where are YOU in this story?

Perhaps you see yourself in the first story as one of the 99 sheep who are still with the shepherd…
or the 9 coins NOT lost.

That seems like a good place to be.

What do you think the attitude was of the 99 sheep when the shepherd noticed one was lost?

I bet they weren't real concerned.

Sheep are pretty selfish animals and frankly could care less about the one that's lost.

Hmmm….

Or maybe we see ourselves as the lost sheep…
or the lost coin…
like the tax collectors and
prostitutes who are lost.

If so, know that God is searching for you right now…
All you have to do is turn to him and
follow…
like the sheep following the
shepherd back to the flock.
and there will be great
rejoicing in heaven.

Does that mean that Jesus approved of prostitutes and thieves?

Certainly not!

But he called them to repent and he
rejoiced when they did.

Or do we identify with the Pharisees…
the religious people…
people working hard to DO
everything right…
but who missed the point of it
all…which is LOVE.

There is a little Pharisee in all of us.

As well, in some ways we are all lost..
There are parts of our lives that we
have yet to turn over to the Good
Shepherd.

There's a little of Jackson in all of us.
Although God continues to pursue
us…

we keep running away.

And part of us is like the 99 sheep or the 9 coins NOT lost…

secure in our selfish lives and
unconcerned for those who ARE lost.

These are powerful stories that show the depth of God's love for us….for everyone.

And it is THAT kind of love that is the deepest desire of every human heart.

And as Christians, it is our job to make sure every lost sheep hears about that Love…
and can come and follow the Good
Shepherd.

AMEN.