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Title: What Disciples Do: Disciples Seek Others

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Text: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

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A few weeks ago, during our *Beach Reads* series, I threw a beach towel over the pulpit and had a few paperback books positioned here just to add a few props to the sermon. Today, I've done the same thing, just to give you a visual reminder of today's sermon. I pulled out our lost and found basket this week and these are actual items from that basket. If you recognize something here that is yours and you've been looking for it, feel free to come up after the service and reclaim it.

Many times, churches become the new owners of umbrellas because it was raining when someone arrived but not when they left. Some things get left when a youth group is held at this campus. Youth seem to be somewhat notorious for forgetting things. But, here we have a variety of things—a water bottle, a children's book, a book on hard passages of the Bible (actually that might make a good sermon series someday), some jackets and sweaters, AND...a Santa hat. I have no idea.

Today, you can put AirTag tracking devices on things that are important to you. AirTags allow you to track the whereabouts of the tag from your phone. I haven't done that yet, but I know many people who have. My son has an AirTag on his dog's collar. I had a conversation last week with a man who said he was thinking about putting an AirTag on his sunglasses so he could keep track of them, but his wife thought that would look stupid. Many people have AirTags on their keyring. My problem is that I'm afraid I would not know where my phone is so that I can locate the AirTag. In our stories today, AirTags would have been handy on the lost sheep and on the lost silver coin.

That's our scripture today from Luke 15 as we consider the second characteristic of *What Disciples Do*. Last week, we identified that disciples take faith seriously and make faith their priority—the priority above all else, including family and possessions. Today, we learn that disciples are concerned about the lost and want what is lost to be found, especially when it comes to people.

We only read the first ten verses of Luke 15, but if you were to read the entire 15th chapter, you would learn that this chapter contains not just two, but three, parables. Jesus begins with the lost sheep, then moves to the lost coin, and then the lost son, the story that we usually call the prodigal son. The lost sheep parable is found in both Matthew and Luke, but the other two you will only find in Luke's gospel. Jesus tells these three parables in response to the Pharisees' grumbling. The Pharisees were the religious

leaders of the day and are often portrayed either as trying to catch him in a trap or just plain ole being unhappy.

This time, they were grumbling among themselves about Jesus eating with “those” people:

“Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (Luke 15:1-2).

Then and now, sharing a meal is a sign of inclusion and hospitality. It creates a bond among those who eat together. Eating wasn’t catching a quick bite at the local coffee house and moving on. Eating was a mark of camaraderie, acceptance, and friendship. And so, in eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus is demonstrating a deep and abiding acceptance of those society has deemed not worthy of common table fellowship.

Like many who enjoy the benefits of privilege, the Pharisees and scribes very likely see themselves as the ninety-nine righteous persons in the parable of the lost sheep who do not need repentance. They want to keep what they have without sharing it with others. They fail to recognize that in God’s reign, there is more than enough to go around.

In today’s two parables, it’s worth noting the unexpected actions of the parable characters. A shepherd cares so much for one lost sheep that he leaves ninety-nine behind to seek the one gone missing. When finding it, he calls friends and neighbors and invites them to rejoice with him. A woman expends significant energy to find her lost coin and then hosts a party that likely costs her more than the coin is worth. And, if we go to that third parable, a father showers gifts and an extravagant party upon his disrespectful, wasteful son, simply because the kid shows up. Such are the ways of God.

At first in these parables, everything seems to revolve around the distinction between sinner and righteous—those lost and those found. We’re used to thinking “we’re all sinners,” but that’s not the way Luke sees it. Rather, when he describes someone as a “sinner,” he’s talking about someone whose pattern of sinning is so habitual, even second nature, that the whole community knows of it.

Similarly, by “righteous,” Luke doesn’t mean those who are perfect, but rather he describes those who actively try to live up to the law. Jesus is welcoming the local untouchables and ne’er-do-wells, the moral disgraces and public outcasts—welcoming, accepting, and befriending, to the point of embarrassment to the authorities. We start out thinking that these are about the differences between sinner and righteous but soon find out that they are about things we lose—a sheep, a coin, a son—and the joy we experience when we find these things again.

That joy is the point of each parable. The concluding sentence of the sheep and coin parables make the connection for us as to why there is so much reason to party.

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

“Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

Repentance may include a mending of one's ways, but the chief characteristic is a turning around. That's how we teach it to our fifth-graders in pastor's class. We make them stand up and when we say "repent" they turn and face the other direction. They are going one way but repentance turns them in a different direction. It is a change in perspective, a recognition of being lost and a corresponding desire to turn around and be found.

A New Testament scholar whom I respect asked a question in a commentary that I use, and I've come back to it again and again this week: "Can you be righteous and still lost?"¹ In many of their sessions, counselors and therapists will hear some version of the words, "I feel like there are parts of myself that have been lost along the way, and I don't know if I can go back and find them again." Let me say it again and see if you have ever felt that way or maybe you are feeling that way at this moment. "I feel like there are parts of myself that have been lost along the way, and I don't know if I can go back and find them again." I thought about parts of my life that had been lost along the way, recent losses and long-ago losses that have never been forgotten.

Some of those lost parts are recent wounds, others are scarred memories. And always the questions: Can we find the lost parts of ourselves? Can we become whole again? I wonder if that's what the shepherd and woman in today's gospel are asking themselves. I wonder if they feel as if they have lost a part of their life—a sheep, a coin. It's not just a sheep, any sheep, but *this* sheep. And it's not just a coin, any coin, but *this* coin. It's not just a part of our life, any part, but *this* part. Without it, we are less than whole, and we want ourselves back.

It most poignantly happens at the death of a loved one, but there are other times, too: what it was like before a falling out with a friend or family member, what it was like before the diagnosis, what it was like before that job loss or the move of a best friend. We want ourselves back. If you know what it's like to have lost a part of yourself, then you know what it's like to be the shepherd and woman in today's gospel. They were whole and complete until something of their life was lost.

Jesus is telling these parables to the tax collectors and sinners who were gathering close to him *and* to the Pharisees and scribes who were grumbling about him *and* to us. The difference between these hearers is not that one group is lost and the other is not lost, one group is sinful and the other righteous. The difference is that one group is lost and they know it and the other group is lost but they don't know it. We've all experienced being lost—physically and emotionally. Sometimes we know it; sometimes we don't. Being able to say we're lost—knowing we are lost—is a huge step toward being found.

Whether we've lost parts of ourselves to grief and sorrow or to the overwhelming and confusing pains of life or to the circumstances that are nobody's fault, Jesus offers grace and forgiveness and consolation. Jesus offers a place at the table. Each and every time something is lost, there is a meal, there is a place at the table—a table where there is love and acceptance and compassion.

Today's gospel is an invitation to wholeness. Every sheep matters. Every coin matters. Every person matters. This is about wholeness and abundance, not as a quantity but quality of life. If we've lost someone who made us whole, we can't bring that person back, but we can find meaning in life through that void. The gospel of Jesus is not about making bad people good. It's about bringing people back to fullness in life. Jesus is always calling us back to ourselves, back to wholeness.

¹ Lose, David. Lost. September 9, 2013 <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/lost>

We know these stories as the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. But that's not completely accurate. They could also be called the parable of the *found* sheep and the parable of the *found* coin.² That's how both stories end. The shepherd is once again whole. The woman is once again whole. And there is rejoicing. They are not just stories of losing but also of finding—finding the object, yes, but more importantly, a restoration for the fullness of life.

Jesus said the shepherd goes after the lost sheep “until he finds it,” and the woman “searches carefully” for the coin “until she finds it.” Until he finds it, until she finds it. There is a promise and a call in that for us too. The promise is that there will be a finding for us, too, and the call is to search until we find the peace that Christ offers.

Sometimes it's a call to light a lamp, sweep our house, and search carefully in the very place in which we live and have our relationships, the place that is most known and familiar. And other times, the call to wholeness takes us into the wilderness, into unknown places.

That kind of searching, searching until we find life again, is not a searching outside of ourselves but a searching within. It means searching until we value beyond what we have done and left undone, beyond what we have or don't have, beyond our successes and failures, beyond what is or might have been. The challenge of Jesus in these stories is to find yourself—to make yourself whole again—and then, *and then*—go and seek those who need the same.

At the heart of the city of London is Charing Cross. All distances across the city are measured from its central point. Locals refer to it simply as “the cross.” One day a child became lost in the bustling metropolis. A city police officer came to the child's aid to try and help him return to his family.

The officer asked the child a variety of questions in an attempt to discover where the boy lived, to no avail. Finally, with tears streaming down the boy's face, he said, “If you will take me to the cross I think I can find my way from there.”³ That should be us. The cross is both the starting place of our new life in Christ and also the place we must return, time and again, to keep our bearings in life. “If you will take me to the cross, I can find my way from there.” That, my friends, is the good news of the gospel.

² This idea of FOUND and other parts of the idea of wholeness in this sermon from Interrupting the Silence, Finding the Lost Pieces of Our Lives – A Sermon On Luke 15:1-10, September 16, 2019 by Michael K. Marsh. <https://interruptingthesilence.com/2019/09/16/finding-the-lost-pieces-of-our-lives-a-sermon-on-luke-151-10/>

³ Story found at <https://thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations-on-being-lost/>