

Whenever I lose something valuable; Or even if it's not valuable – if it's something which is:

- *essential; or*
- *difficult to find a replacement; or*

....

• *if I just don't want to admit that I lost it sometimes I search and search and search. Sometimes I find it. Sometimes I don't.*

When we read chapter 15 of Luke, it very quickly becomes obvious, that our Lord, has immense passion for the lost.

He:

- seeks the lost;
- searches for the lost;
- welcomes the lost;
- celebrates when “the lost” return...

Last week's bible reading finished with Jesus saying: “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**” And immediately, we come into today's bible reading, and there **is** a group of people who **are** listening.

the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

But, not everybody was happy about that. The religious leaders – the Pharisees and the Scribes (religious lawyers) grumbled....

Some people are always grumbling, aren't they... – never happy; always poking the finger, and finding fault...

"This man (this Jesus bloke) receives sinners and eats with them." Owww...

You see, they wrote Jesus off. Why? Because He mixed with the ungodly. And so, Jesus told them 3 parables in a row, about: A lost sheep; A lost coin; and A lost son... And we're going to look at the first two of those today.

On our farm at Goondiwindi, we were wheat and sheep. And most of our country was melon-hole country. Think of the biggest melon-holes you see around Moonie, and our melon-holes were every bit as big as that (some were bigger and badder)...

And our boundary fence was an old rabbit & dog-netting fence (some of you will know the kind). Now, the thing is, when melon-holes form, it's really hard to keep a fence sealed. And sometimes when we'd get the sheep in to work them, we'd find ourselves short – 50; 60; sometimes over 100 sheep.

*And so, you'd go out and muster the paddock again, because most of those had probably buried themselves in the cane grass in the bottom of a melon-hole, and you just wouldn't see them as you went past them. And usually, with the **second** muster, we'd get most of them in...*

But there would always be 2 or 3, maybe as many as 8 or 10, who had wandered off into the neighbours. They didn't mean to leave. They'd just be doing their own thing, not paying any attention: Head down, nibbling bits of grass as they go along; Nice green pick in the bottom of the melon-hole, and before

long, they've followed that green-pick through a kangaroo-hole or a pig-hole that they've left the domain of "Tenomby", and they're lost on "Dunworrie".

So, next time the Cranney's were doing sheep work, they'd bring a few of our sheep home to us; just like each time we were doing sheep work, we'd take a few of their sheep home to them...

Jesus told a story of a shepherd who was missing a sheep. Out of a flock of 100, he was missing one. That's a 1% loss, if you're not real good with maths.

Now, remember, this is before the days of fences. And so, if one sheep was lost, and the shepherd wanted it back, he'd have to go looking for it.

And Jesus poses this parable as a question:

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

Hmm... Tough question... Would a shepherd leave the 99 sheep, to find the one??? I'm actually not too sure about that... Our Bible translation we used this morning (ESV) says **"leave the ninety-nine in the open country"**, and "the open country" sorta sounds like a place of safety where none can go missing... But other translations translate it as "leave them in the wilderness"... And that doesn't sound so safe. The "wilderness" is where wild animals are and sheep aren't

safe from predators... The Greek word ἐρήμω (erēmō) actually means a deserted/isolated place...

So, if I had to leave the flock to go and look for the one, maybe it might be ok, because there's not much around; it is out in the open... Maybe I could leave them for a short while, and they won't scatter too much...

But hang on, he's going to look until he finds it. How long's that going to take? I mean, it might be reasonable to leave the sheep for a little while, to go and have a short look, but Jesus is asking, "Would you search until you found it?" Well, I'm not too sure about that....

And when he **does** find it, he's going to put it on his shoulder and carry it home (rejoicing as he goes)... And I get that (yep) "Cool. I found my sheep." Yeah, I'm really happy about that...

And if it was a lamb, maybe I would carry it on my shoulder, but not if it was a full-grown sheep. It can jolly-well walk itself...

But I do get the joy. He was looking for his lost sheep, and he found it. Yay!!!

I do get the joy, but the next bit, I don't get:

V⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

Now, that's never going to happen... Seriously...

Now, I've heard city preachers talk about this, and they say, "We've just gotta understand how much an ancient shepherd loved his sheep."

Come on. Get off the grass...

Let me talk to the farmers. You know how much you value a good working dog, hey... And if, during the day, your best working dog goes missing (out in the paddock), you're going to go looking for it. You'll ride across the paddocks; you'll follow the tracks home; look at the watering points. If by night time, you still haven't found it, you'll probably ring the neighbours and say, "Can you keep an eye out for my dog please" ... And you will search and search and search.

*And if you find it, you **will** rejoice, and be so happy... You might even ring your neighbours and say, "Stop looking, I've found him."*

But I highly doubt that you'd invite your neighbours over to celebrate with you, that you have found your dog...

You see, at this point in the parable, we realise that Jesus isn't giving us an example – He's setting up a contrast...

- Yes, the shepherd cares for his sheep, **but not that much.**
- Yes, the shepherd may leave the 99 in the deserted, isolated place,, but not for too long.
- Yes, the shepherd would be happy that he found the sheep.

- But seriously, is he going to invite his friends and neighbours over to celebrate... Don't be stupid.

And that's where we realise that Jesus has been setting up a contrast...

God, is **not** like us. God has a passion for the lost, that, quite frankly, the religious leaders could not comprehend.

Or the woman who lost the coin.

She had 10 Drachma. A Drachma is a silver Greek coin, worth about a day's wages. And she lost one of them.

Now, that's pretty significant. She's lost a coin that was worth a whole day's wages. That's worth looking for.

She lights a lamp; and she sweeps the house; and she searches and searches until she finds it.

And I get that:

Not long ago, I was fixing my glasses, and I took a tiny screw out, and I dropped it. I mean, how far can it go? A tiny little thing. It's got no mass to it... And I got down on the floor, and I searched and searched and searched... I even went and got a little dustpan and brush, and swept and swept,, and I couldn't find it. And then I went and got a torch. And I put the torch down on the floor, and shone it along the floor... And there it was, right over under a piece of conduit, nowhere near where I'd dropped it...

And when I found that screw, I was so happy, because I really needed those glasses, and I couldn't put them back together, without it... I rejoiced, because I found the missing screw.

But I'll tell you what I did not do. I didn't call out over the fence to (Deena; Silvana; Scruff), and say, "Come over here. I want you to celebrate with me, because I found the missing screw for my glasses..."

They'd think I was weird...

This lady did that. I mean, who does do that??? "Come over to my place. I found that thing I lost. We're going to have a party" ...

It's a contrast. **Nobody** does that...

But God does.

In the sheep story, Jesus said:

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.

In the coin story, Jesus said:

I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The point Jesus is making, is “The joy in heaven (when one sinner repents), is beyond expectation, and it is beyond reason.”

And yet, **that** is who God is.

- He is the one who goes looking for the lost;
- He is the one who celebrates when a sinner repents; and
- the whole purpose of the story, is that He is the one who wants **us** to celebrate (with Him) when a sinner repents.

And we are to be like Jesus. Jesus is the one:

- who left His heavenly home, to bring sinners to holiness.
- who didn't stay in the “holy huddle” – He went out into the streets and the by-ways, and ate with tax-collectors and sinners;
- whom, those who were righteous in their own eyes, rejected.

And yet the outcast heard the good news of hope; salvation; and welcome to the Kingdom of God.

And Jesus is the One

- Who is overjoyed, every time a single sinner repents.

And so, those religious leaders, despite all of their religious training; and all of their striving for holiness, they failed to recognise God's Son. And they failed to understand the passion that God has for the lost. They criticised Jesus for being amongst tax-collectors and sinners – the riff-raff that (in their eyes) were the epitome of reprobates to be avoided...

But there Jesus was. Why? Because there is joy in heaven, at the repentance of one sinner.

So,,,, in this encounter with Jesus, who are the sinners?

I suspect the religious leaders would have been fully confident that they themselves were in the top 10% of the 99 righteous. But this interaction with Jesus, shows they were a long way from God. And their very rejection of the Son of God, reveals that they are among the **worst** of sinners...

So, who were the sinners

In Romans 3, Paul discusses the difference between the Jews (God's people who have lived by the Law), and the Gentiles (the Pagan people who are far from God) **Romans 3: (ESV)**
²² For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The Gentiles who didn't have the Law of God, of course they've sinned (knowingly and unknowingly). And those who **studied** the Law of God: They should be well aware that they did not meet God's standard.... All are sinners.

And that's the way it is, isn't it??? I know, the closer I get to God, and the more I learn about His Holiness and Righteousness, the more I realise, "I'm not up to spec.". In other words: the more saved I am, the more I realise how much I not only needed a saviour, but I **continue** to need Jesus to be my saviour...

Jesus came to save sinners. Jesus died on the cross, not just for a few – Jesus died to make it possible for **every** sinner to turn to God and be saved.

AND!!!!

The key points here, are “repentance” and “celebration”.

Jesus came for the Scribes and Pharisees, **just as much** as He came for the Tax-collectors and sinners. The thing is, the difference between the tax-collectors & sinners and the Scribes & Pharisees, was one group, were sinners who **knew** they needed a saviour, and the other group, were sinners who had a deluded confidence in their own righteousness. And so, they not only rejected the Saviour – **criticised** Him (grumbled about Him) for drawing sinners to righteousness.

The Tax-collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus to hear Him. They **were** responding to Jesus. They **were** willing to be found.

But, the religious leaders, were:

- **not** listening;
- grumbling;

Righto:

Let's bring it forward to today.

There are many who are lost.

- Some are like sheep – they wander off, not meaning to, but they soon find themselves lost, away from God.
- Some are like that coin – they drop away – they fall – they end up in a dark, dark corner.
- Some are like the prodigal son (that we’re going to consider next time) – who deliberately and knowingly reject The Father, and choose their own way...

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is “Jesus came to save ‘the lost’”, and that is the same message that we proclaim today.

But there is no point proclaiming this message, unless we go to the lost, who will hear it.

When we begin to love the lost like God loves the lost, we will go out from our “holy huddle”. We will take light into darkness, and share Jesus with those who desperately need Him.

Something I’ve realised, is that when you become a Christian, the longer one has been a Christian, the more one will delight in the company of other Christians (and that’s a good thing). But there’s a ‘down-side’ to that. We also become increasingly **un**comfortable in the presence of:

- the immoral;
- the foul-mouthed;
- the misogynist;

- the violent;
- the addict;
- pervert...

And that's normal, because we love "our brother", and we hate sin... But as we become more like Jesus, an enormous love will develop, for the "un-saved", along with a great passion for "the lost".

In the reading today, there were:

- Seekers; and
- Rejoicers;

- Hearers; and
- Grumblers;

And I pray, that we will be a people who Seek; Hear; and Rejoice. And never be a church who grumble.

I pray that we would be a church, whom some would criticise, because we actually have "sinners" over for dinner...

And I pray that The Lord will do His thing, as He saves the lost.

With the help of God:

- We go out into the world;
- we bring sinners into our homes;
- We pray for the lost;
- We seek the lost; and

- We rejoice, when even one repents; and
- we open our arms, to receive them as one of us,

for we too,

- were sinners who were lost, but are now found.
- repented of sin, and found holiness in our Saviour;
- have been carried home on the shoulders of our Saviour.

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank You,
that You are the shepherd
who seeks the lost until it is found.

And we thank You,
that you did that for us.

And Lord, it is so humbling, to consider,
the praise from the angels in heaven,
when I (when each one of us)
repented of sin, and turned to our Saviour.

And as the Gospel goes out into this world,
It is impossible to comprehend,
the endless praise being heard in heaven today;
as in yesterday; and the day before...

- The eternal praise, proclaiming:
Hallelujah – another one for Jesus...

And Lord, we pray for this little church:

That we would be a people who rejoice;
And that **You** would give us reason to rejoice:
day after day; week after week,
as "sinners" come to this very place,
to hear You, and that in hearing You,
Repent and are born again, into Your Kingdom.

Lord, what Joy.

Praise Jesus.

Amen.