

Finding God
Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)

I once stuck up a conversation with a lady sitting next to me on a plane. And as many are wont to do after discovering that I am a pastor, she started asking me a bunch of questions about God and Church. In the course of our conversation, she began talking about the value of church for her children, and then she said what most parents sooner or later say when discussing the subject of children and church: “I send my children to church so they can learn how to be good people”. When it comes to religion, it always seems to circle back to this notion of goodness. And so, I asked her a question in return: “Okay, but what does that even mean, goodness? How do you know what type of goodness your children are learning anyways? There are so many options to choose from, and everyone defines goodness differently”. Ask a hundred people and you will get a hundred different responses: to the court system it is “Order”; to the school system it is “Knowledge”; to the wise man it is “Truth”; to the fool it is “Pleasure”, to the enamored it is “Love”, to the vain it is “Beauty”; to the dreamer it is “Freedom”; to the mother it is “Home”; to the soldier it is “Honor”; to the poor it is “Equity”. Who’s to say which one is most important? And which form of goodness should the church be expected to emphasize? When we start with questions of goodness, we are starting in the wrong place, and that’s why these types of conversation turn in all kinds of unexpected directions. But if we start with Christ, then there is only one way the conversation can unfold.

Jesus never let Himself be drawn into questions of goodness or badness, which are always subjective terms; a matter of personal preference, really. Christ came instead to divide soul and spirit, joint and marrow; He trafficked in truth not fiction, reality not illusion. God is a God of life, and He calls upon us to live the truth without apology. Hence why it is only here, in this place, that life makes sense. For until we are found by God, we have no idea that we are lost in this life. This is the real meaning behind the “Parable of the Lost Sheep”. Only the shepherd knows that the one sheep is lost. To the wandering sheep, life is good. The sheep is doing just fine without any help. It’s just out for a stroll in the pastures, minding its own business, doing its own thing. Only the shepherd senses the real danger, and leaves the others to search and find it. And it is not until we are finally brought home that we even recognize that we were lost to begin with. This seems backward, I admit, but this is the way it is. To reduce the Church to some type of training ground for morality, or the Bible to some type of

verbal straightjacket, which hinders our personal freedoms, cheapens the message of Christ. It also downplays the real dangers, which lurk in the valley. We have no idea what we are up against, and no amount of human advancement will ever prepare us for the real enemies, which seek our demise. As humans we all share one thing in common: this incessant desire to overcome our sense of loneliness, our sense of anxiety, our lack of purpose or aim or direction. Truth be told, we are willing to do almost anything to fill the void of our empty lives. The greener pastures will always entice us away because they hold out the prospect of something better; a momentary distraction from the monotony. But these are just illusions. No matter how often we give into our cravings, they always come back. Nothing in this world satisfies us for very long. Everything gets boring eventually, and so we go out searching for bigger and better thrills. Life spins out of control, turning us every which way but loose, and we become entangled in the hedge. God must come to us. He searches us out. He finds us in the labyrinth of sin. He calls us by name. He picks us up in His arms. He carries us on His back. He leads us home. This is the kind of Savior we have, and all the heavens rejoice upon His return.

The real question we should be asking this morning, and the question that intrigues me the most, is not how does this parable teach us to be moral, but rather why does God care so much? Why does He even care if we are lost? Why doesn't He just abandon us to our own devices. We do it all the time. Do we ourselves not lose patience, lose interest, lose heart? Do we not finally give up on people? When someone offends us or hurts us, aren't we quick to say: "If that's how you want to live or act then fine, go on then, do what you want, but you're on your own? Why should God be any different. Why should He be the one to go in search for us when we ourselves are the ones who wandered away? And the answer will always be love. Love makes you do fool hearted things. Things that don't make good sense for there's no rhyme or reason to love. It just is. For the love God has for us, He does all things, endures all things, bears all things. God never stops trying, never says enough is enough. His is a love that even when abused or neglected or taken for granted never fades or falters. God's love is a perfect love. God will keep searching for His own long after the rest of us have called off the search. Until the very end, He searches, and we are all sitting here today precisely because He doesn't give up. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy Mills