The weight of this scripture on a day where we remember the feeling of lost on September 11 is not lost on me. This is a day of sadness for many people and before delving in, I want to encourage any of you that need support to reach out to Fr. Roldan, Fr. Pinzon, or myself. I remember being barely eighteen and watching our country, those who were lost literally and emotionally. I remember how many people helped the emotionally and spiritually lost find comfort in Christ. We will pray for those who were lost, their loved ones, and our military later in the service. For now, we will remember what it is like to

In today’s Gospel lesson from Luke, we read two of three of the parables in Luke chapter 15, starting with the parable of the lost sheep followed by the parable of the lost coin. The final parable in Luke 15 which was not read today is the parable of the lost son or sons, better known as the parable of the prodigal son. This is a story about being “the found ones” and how that calls us into being Christians.

 In the Gospel, we start with those who claim they have found God and are following God’s ways. The Pharisees, who with their knowledge would seem to be examples of positivity. It would seem natural for those who are in the Light of God to be joyful, however, the passage begins with a complaint from the Pharisees and scribes, who say about Jesus, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In this case, they are right that Jesus does this often.[[1]](#footnote-1) What we know, at St. Dunstan’s is that Jesus is actually doing the exact right thing.[[2]](#footnote-2) He helps those who need it most turn their hearts to God.

One thing that is sometimes overlooked is the size of the crowd. People were intrigued by Jesus and he accepted people. It is easy to picture an intimate setting for this Gospel reading, however, it is actually a larger crowd. The Pharisees are concerned with purity. They fear these sinners are lagging behind with their standards. Of course, these religious leaders are supposed to be shepherds to the people, but they are not saving the lost. In the same way that the sheep and coin could not find itself, neither can the tax collectors and sinners. They are lost, which by definition means they don’t know which way to go.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Pharisee had an exclusive club of “friends” who are focused on keeping the law in a particularly strict fashion. In contrast, sinners were those on the outside who weren’t as pure or strictly observant. The Pharisees wanted to separate themselves to maintain their ritual purity.[[4]](#footnote-4)

What they miss is that the goal is to have repentance, which is really about a heart that must first be changed.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Jesus ignores common thoughts about shepherds being low class, instead elevating them in a parable. Jesus reminds them that he is like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep or a woman searching for a lost coin, in that his concern is to shepherd the flock, in contrast to the Pharisees who aren’t being the shepherds they were called to be.[[6]](#footnote-6)

People want to be found. I imagine the Pharisees wanted God to clean these sinners up first before presenting them in “polite society.” But Jesus focuses upon finding the lost, instead of merely judging them for being lost. This pursuit is joyful. When the lost is found there is joy in heaven. God rejoices every time the lost are found. This is one reason why a funeral is considered a celebration of life.[[7]](#footnote-7) The souls are reunited with their creator for eternity. We celebrate that the souls on earth are united with God forever.

When we are lost, we need someone to find us. Similarly, sheep that are domesticated are ill equipped to find their way. If our hearts are hard after being overly focused upon the rules of our religion, we may miss out on caring for God’s creation. Ironically this can lead us to become lost ourselves.[[8]](#footnote-8)  I’m sure we have all met Christians who seem more concerned with enforcing the rules rather than joyful living.

Those who presume they are the righteous ones, who have the most accurate interpretation of the Bible, and the correct political beliefs, and so on. No doubt, while the historic Pharisees are no longer with us, the spirit of their error can still live on today.

Today’s parables invites us to imitate Christ and become like that woman and that Good Shepherd. Search for what is lost to become as good a housekeeper as the woman ends up being, or as good of a navigator like the good shepherd.[[9]](#footnote-9) Our work is never truly complete until everyone is seated around the table in fellowship together. Not 99 out of 100 sheep, or 9 out of 10 coins, but all together.

This means putting away our differences and helping everyone find Christ, ourselves included.

Here is a connection to Old Testament made by scholar Ken Bailey :

David is chosen by God to be the Shepherd of his people, Moses is referred to as a shepherd. Micah wrote of a new shepherd leading his flock. God in the Old Testament is seen as a shield, high tower, fortress, high place, refuge, rock, stronghold, horn of salvation.[[10]](#footnote-10)

These are popular images of strength and defense in the Psalms. Interestingly, Jesus uses less frequent imagery from the Psalms that portray God in more tender ways. Psalm 23 speaks of God as a good Shepherd. Psalm 131 portrays God as like a loving and compassionate mother, and Psalm 103 portrays God as a father. Taken together we see Jesus tell stories about a good shepherd, a good woman, and a good father. These are also the three main characters in Luke chapter 15. [[11]](#footnote-11)

Similarly, when we are the ones who stand in the flock, we can strive to be like the woman and the shepherd and mirror our actions after God’s actions. We must remember that we have been found and then rejoice anytime others are found.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The question of why the lost being found creates a space for God to rejoice is important; the faithful are called to: be obedient, procl the devoted then respond by loving the sacred laws, fulfilling devotions, fasting, sacrificing, and giving to those in need.[[13]](#footnote-13) Lord and acting in justful and merciful manners.[[14]](#footnote-14)

There are many ways we are called to be found and rejoice. We are called to do so when we look at our enemies and see the good in them. In that moment, the Spirit in us recognizes the way the Creator is manifested in that person. And we rejoice.

We are called to be found when we recognize our daily habits in the secular world no longer reflect the ways of Christ. We are called to be found and rejoice when we overcome our fears and boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ. It is in this last instance when we can find others who are lost and help them realize that they are the treasures God is seeking. It is at these moments when God’s flock is complete. It is at this moment that the party is ready to begin. Amen.

1. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This idea was part of the idea from Fr. Roman.’s blog: Roman, R. (2022). The Parables of Luke, Part 2. “The Apocryphal gospel of Thomas explains why the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in the dessert and searches for the one that “went astray.” The lost sheep was the “largest.” When the shepherd finds it, he exclaims, “I love thee more than the ninety-nine.”5 Thomas clearly associates the lost sheep with Israel, the beloved nation of God. In the gospel of Luke, however, there is no mention of the size of the animal and there is no association of the lost sheep with the nation. The lost sheep are the “tax collectors and sinners” of verse 1. Their “value” or “weight” in the community has no bearing on the decision of the shepherd to look for them.” https://saintdunstans.org/fr-romans-blog/the-parables-of-luke-15-part-2-reading-the-parable-of-the-lost-sheep-as-a-palestinian-jew/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Guzik, D. (2022). https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-15/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stone,M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Roldan, R.(2022). The Parables of Luke, Part 4. https://saintdunstans.org/fr-romans-blog/the-parables-of-luke-15-part-4-the-lost-coin-luke-151-3-8-10/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.31-37 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Guzik, D. (2022). https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-15/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Bailey, K.E. (2014). *The Good Shepherd: A thousand year journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp.109-152 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)