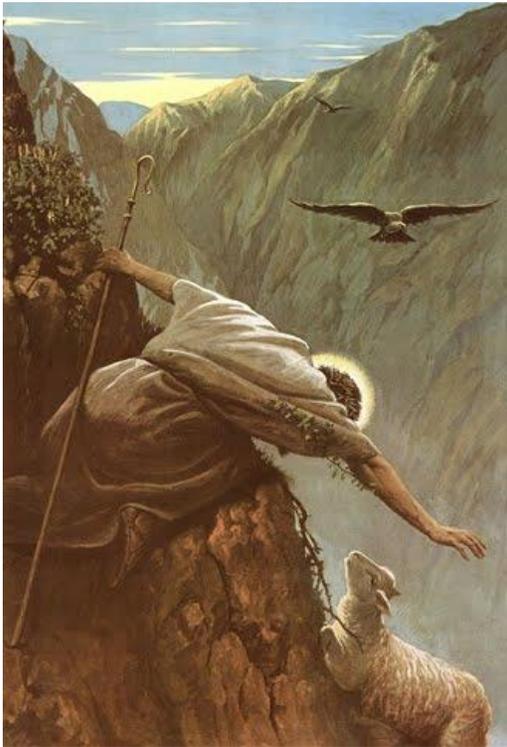


3rd Sunday after Pentecost EF 2021
Luke 15: 1-10

At that time, the publicans and sinners were drawing near to Him to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.



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Or what woman, having ten drachmas, if she loses one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma that I had lost.' Even so, I say to you, there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

But He spoke to them this parable, saying, What man of you having a hundred sheep, and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing. And on coming home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.' I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance.



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The shepherd in the desert and the homemaker in the house share so much. They are both in charge of their worlds. They are responsible for the care of their worlds and both are accountable to a higher authority.

They also share loss.

We're certainly familiar with loss. We still suffer with the memory of the 9/11 attacks. Approximately 3000 people from over 90 countries lost their lives in New York, Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon that day.ⁱ I was privileged to be part of a critical incident stress management team that debriefed surviving NYPD officers. I heard their stories of loss first-hand. Those attacks precipitated events that led to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where there have been over 100,000 civilian and 7000 coalition deaths.ⁱⁱ

The news tells us that we've just suffered our 267th mass shooting for 2021. Nationally, we've lost over 8,700 killed as a result of gun violence this year and that only accounts for ¼ of our homicides.^{iii iv}

We know loss on a personal level. I just presided at an internment of a friend, Joe Bober, yesterday across Gull Rd. He had lost the Church for decades and then found me. I visited with Rosaries and he asked to be taken to Confession and Mass. I was so buoyed with hope and then to lose him...

We know loss.

Our two parables tell us about being found.

Our parables answer the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus eats with sinners. The parables point to God's love for each and every one of us.

The shepherd drops everything to rescue the one errant sheep. The woman turns her house upside down in search of the one coin and when she finds it she calls together her neighbors. I wonder how many coins that party cost?

In each of these stories Jesus asks, "and who among you would not do the same?" Well, I don't think anyone I know would. Who would abandon 99 sheep to potential predators to search for one sheep without even any assurance of finding it? I already questioned the reasonableness of the woman throwing a costly party upon finding her coin.

When I worked at a foundry, we had an acceptable scrap level. We would not interrupt the production flow of dozens of castings to try to fix one bad casting. We'd just throw the bad casting back into the furnace—a scary thought that I **do not** want to make into a metaphor for you and me.

But you see the shepherd and the woman in these stories do not represent you and me. Bible stories may tell us much about our human character and our responsibilities to each other, but Scripture is ultimately a revelation about God: who God is and what God's relationship is with us.

The shepherd and the woman are icons for God. God finds us lost ones.

The ultimate point of our lost and found stories is our call to **rejoice**.^v Each story we listened to results in gratitude. Our failure to get it is because we think the story is too good to be true. We all harbor the guilt that we are undeserving. Just like we cast off our scrap, we often do the same spiritually—we hedge our bets. We are afraid to love God with the same abandon with which he loves us. It is the primal fear of unreturned love. It reminds one of the first romantic kiss, the tension when you go to make the move, the fear that the intention might not be returned. God does not hedge his bets when it comes to us. God tells us, "What does 'undeserving' have to do with it? You are my daughter. You are my son. I love you." That is why we dare to call Jesus, brother and Mary, mother.

It is God's job to save us. It is our job to celebrate. But, for me to go to those thousands of families who have lost loved ones and tell them to celebrate could sound as trite as the song, *Don't worry, be happy*. The challenge for us is that none of us can really accept how wonderful God's news for us truly is. We live in the practical world of hedged bets and partially fulfilled promises. God's love is so abundant, that we are afraid to believe it.

We need God's grace to help us suspend our skepticism. He offers that grace as he makes himself present in Body and Blood at this altar today. We are undeserving and yet he withholds nothing from us as we "celebrate"... "celebrate" his death and resurrection. The gift is beyond our comprehension. The mystery stretches our imagination. As I come to his table I pray, "Lord, I do believe; help my unbelief!"^{vi}

The last word of the shepherd was "rejoice".

The last word of the woman was "rejoice".

Jesus, who has found you, says, "rejoice".

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ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-American_casualties_of_the_September_11%2C_2001_attacks

ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Iraq_War ,
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/aug/10/afghanistan-civilian-casualties-statistics> &
<http://icasualties.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-gun-politics-shootings-health-3a38e35db46f4b3b76af3ed566e47c0c>

^{iv} <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/stabbing-deaths-by-country>

^v *The Relentless Widow*, John Shea, p. 81

^{vi} Mark 9:24