

SERMON: Rejoice With Me!  
TEXT: Luke 15:1-10

9-11-22

I was hiding under a bed in my grandparents house, listening to the voices of family members - especially my mother - as they wondered out loud where I was. And I smiled to myself as their curiosity turned to concern. I wondered how long it would take them to find me. I wondered how long I should wait until I revealed myself. And I was eager for their rejoicing when I was found.

You can probably guess how this story ended. I don't remember whether someone found me or I finally came out from under the bed. But I do remember that "rejoicing" was not even in the top ten of the greetings I received.

Everyone was angry with me. Especially my mother. Everyone kept asking me, "why?" I don't think I had an answer. I just know there were a lot of aunts and uncles and cousins and

sisters and brothers around, and I wasn't getting the attention I wanted. I guess I was feeling lost, so I made sure I was lost.

Of course, the lost sheep and the lost coin that Jesus told about were inanimate objects. Neither could get lost on purpose like I did as a child. And though a sheep may have a mischievous spirit that causes it to wander, it cannot act with intent beyond filling its basic needs for water, food, and physical comfort. So, it never occurred to me to look at these parables from the lost one's perspective.

With these stories, Jesus was responding to the Pharisees and scribes who grumbled because he was sharing table fellowship with lost ones like tax collectors and sinners. And we, as the church, tend to think more like Pharisees than like Jesus. We might grumble, too, wondering why Jesus isn't attending to the faithful ones who are here, rather than chasing after one who

has strayed? Why risk losing the 99 for the potential to save one? Especially the mischievous one; he's only going to run away again.

Let me grumble a little more. When the woman finds the coin that was lost, she spends it on a party for her friends and neighbors! Seems to me, she didn't need the money that badly if she could throw it away on non-essentials! Also, she could have earned that much again in the time it took her to find what she lost.

But instead of grumbling like Pharisees, let's think about what it feels like to be lost.

I saw a beautiful story on the CBS morning news just yesterday. In remembrance of 9/11, the story was about the 9/11 museum and memorial. In one room, there are photos of the nearly 3,000 victims of the worst terrorist attack on our country. But two photos were missing, and one museum worker made it

his personal mission to find a photo of a man who worked in the cafeteria at the Twin Towers. The man's wife had died also, but a step daughter was found. She had no photos because her step father didn't like having his picture taken. So the museum worker continued his search, which led him to the town where the man grew up and the high school he attended. They did not keep old yearbooks, but a city councilwoman took over from there. She found the yearbooks in the local history museum, guessed the decade in which the man might have graduated, and paged through the yearbooks until she found his photo. It now hangs where there was just an empty space above his name in the museum. And the vow made by our country, individually and collectively, was kept. "We will never forget."

I know that we have all felt lost at one time or another, even as adults. When life changes suddenly - you lose your home or your job, a significant relationship ends or a close family member dies unexpectedly, you or a loved one receive a life-changing diagnosis - feeling lost is a common and natural response.

That lost feeling is all too familiar to us, but what is it like to be found after such devastating circumstances?

Within a year of being divorced, I resigned from the church I was serving, sold my house, essentially kicked my adult children out of the nest, moved to Cape Girardeau, bought a house, and started serving a new church. While many of these changes were positive, there was also a good deal of loss involved.

The following summer, I attended a Worship and Music Conference at Montreat Camp and Conference Center in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Worship was held every day in a large stone and wood chapel, and the music was phenomenal. One day we sang a new hymn, called *A Woman and a Coin*, from the *Glory to God* hymnal. I was unfamiliar with the hymn, but the congregation full of musicians sang it with confidence. *A Woman and a Coin* retells the parables from today's scripture reading. At first, I was unmoved by the words, and focused on learning the melody. But on the fourth stanza, my heart was suddenly pierced

by the words, "Am I that treasured coin worth searching for?" Immediately, I felt a lump in my throat and had to stop singing. But the voices all around me embraced me in the music and lifted me in the resounding words, "I'm found, and you rejoice! What love! What love!" The same thing happened with the next verse. The story was told, and the question was raised, "Am I that treasured sheep worth dying for? I live, and you rejoice! What love! What love!"

I'm found, and my Lord Jesus rejoices. What love! What love! That day, I learned what it felt like - and what it sounded like - to be found and lifted from the depths of great loss.

The idea that such a transforming and redeeming love could be received with grumbles rather than rejoicing, is unthinkable. Even for tax collectors and sinners. Even for those who do despicable things. Even for those we consider to be against us. Even for those we don't understand. Perhaps they are lost.

In fact, Jesus tells us that they are lost. “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.” When we are in the midst of sin, we are on the wrong road, going in the wrong direction. We are lost. But when we repent, we realize the error of our ways, and we turn around. We find a better path, and our guide and companion along that path is Jesus.

In the Presbyterian Church, when we are baptized, when we are confirmed or join the church, when we are ordained and installed as elders, we make three promises. “Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, we promise to turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world.” We promise to “turn to Jesus Christ, accepting him as our Lord and Savior and trusting in his grace and love.” And we promise to “be Christ’s faithful disciples, obeying his Word and showing his love.” These are occasions of great rejoicing for the ones making their vows and for the congregation that receives them.

The shepherd invites us, REJOICE WITH ME! The woman invites us, REJOICE WITH ME! For there is great joy in heaven and among the angels, and for all of us, when lost ones are found. REJOICE WITH ME! To the glory of God!

AMEN.