

# *All for One, One for All*

Luke 15:1-7

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ June 26, 2022 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

<sup>1</sup> Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> 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. (Luke 15:1-7, NRSV)



If someone were to ask me about my favorite preaching experience, it was one in which only two people from this church were there, at a little church in Guatemala on a short immersion trip with Lorie Sprinkle. Her husband Ron served as my translator, which made the sermon about twice as long. During that message, I told a parable of sorts about the day I proposed to my wife.

“There is a place” (in fact that is its slogan, “There is a place”) in Central Oregon where Wendy’s family and my family have visited every year since we were in fourth grade. So, in 1993, on a trip during our dating years in college, we made plans to rent a canoe and paddle out on the pond, which had been our custom. Only, this time, I was planning to have the ring in my pocket, and wait till the perfect quiet moment to pop the question.

But the night before, I started having a lot of questions. When you propose, you want to be closer than the eight-foot span of a canoe. I

envisioned being on one knee, so how was this all going to work? And how do you even start that conversation? So, I wrote her a poem. Now, I’m not going to tell you the whole poem. That’s just between the two of us. You can ask her and maybe she’ll tell you the rest. I’m just going to share with you the way it started, which was all about these questions I was having. It began like this:

*“What can I say? What can I do?  
Can I kneel inside a canoe?”*

There was more to it than that, but these are the questions that I brought into this Guatemalan church at a time of cultural, political turmoil with so much going on around them, much of which still exists. To watch their pastor reflecting afterwards (in Spanish that was too fast for me) what it must be like to scoot forward and try to propose in an unstable situation. He was doing this [rocking boat] with his hands and laughing with his congregation, but in a rare preaching moment, I could tell—*they got it*. It was a parable that made sense. There was encouragement found in Scripture that there really *are* things we can say and there really *are* things we can do. And we really *can* kneel and pray and trust a good and faithful God in the midst of chaos.

In the end, by the way, the boat did not tip, the ring stayed dry, and Wendy, well, *eventually*, said “yes.”

For this summer season, we are beginning a series on the “Kingdom of Heaven” parables of Jesus, stories Jesus tells to give us a sense of what this different kind of Kingdom looks like. Many of them begin with the words, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...”, but some, like the parable of the lost sheep, do not.

When we hear the word “Kingdom” we tend to think about geographical locations ruled by various political groups or people here on Earth. And when we hear the word “Heaven” we tend to think of that

place we will eventually visit after our time on Earth has ended. In both cases, Jesus brings stories about familiar things to help us “re-think” or “re-hear” the way we have approached both “Kingdoms” as we think of them now and “Heaven” as a place in the future.

The “Kingdom of Heaven” is not something we discover *someday*, but something we enter into right now. The Kingdom of Heaven does not come only after we die sometime in the future. The Kingdom of Heaven does not come when the *right* political leaders are in place and make the right decisions *for* the Kingdom. No! The Kingdom of Heaven is now, a different reality altogether, peace-filled because of Who is the King over it. And it exists side-by-side with all of the other political kingdoms and realms that are filled with so many unexplainable and painful realities.

The Kingdom of Heaven gives us different things to say, different things to do, and is the *reason* we can kneel even inside a canoe.

One overarching comment I’d like to make about a theme that runs through many of the parables that we will study. It’s a theme of joy. My little parable of the canoe is a memory of joy for me. But in a much deeper and wider way, the Kingdom of Heaven is one in which people find joy. Unrestrained joy. The “let’s throw a party” kind of joy, and share it with everyone. The treasure hidden in the field, the lost coin, the prodigal son, all of them end with great celebration.

This morning, our very first parable in this series, is not exception. Jesus says the man called everyone together to celebrate, that there would be so much “joy over just this one that is found”. When Jesus quotes the man, he is also saying this to the people at the table, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.” Interesting that “sheep” in English could be singular OR plural. This very first parable is about who we think is invited *into* that Kingdom of Heaven. And it’s about joy (and not regret) that they get to be at the table. That can be a fine line to walk if we’re honest. So, right away, in a just a few simple sentences, Jesus’ story serves as reassurance to many, and as a warning and a challenge to others. This might be more accurately called the parable of the Found Sheep,

because of the joy, rather than sadness, that is the characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Like many of the parables and stories of Jesus’ life, more than one of the Gospel writers often recorded them. In this case, the context and details of the story are different enough, that scholars debate whether they were the same telling of the story. Matthew 18 is much shorter and reads like this. Listen for the differences:

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven...

...<sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

*(Matthew’s version of the story...in Chapter 18)*

First, you’ll notice that I left out several verses between 1 and 12 of that chapter. Matthew includes several comments about how we are to approach **children** in God’s Kingdom, and especially children that we might not expect to have great respect or standing before God. These are the ones that deserve our *greatest* respect. So, the audience here is Jesus’ disciples, a conversation about how to approach ministry more intergenerationally, which of course, as a pastor to youth, I’m thrilled about.

But the audience in our story today in Luke is something quite different—two different groups on opposite sides of a meal they are sharing. It almost makes it seem that Jesus used the same story for two very different purposes – which of course I did with the parable of the canoe earlier, so why not? Why couldn’t Jesus use the same story to teach different groups with different messages? Even the story in Luke told around a table of different people had different purposes even for those that were gathered *in that space*.

It’s not really that important, many would agree, to try and figure out who wrote their story first, or who embellished their story to make a point. Rather, let’s take a look at the truth of the Good

News of the Gospel that is made so evident here in Luke.

I tend to like this story because of the setting and the audience. It stirs the imagination to try and picture the reactions and side glances from the various groups around the table. Rather than making any excuses or trying to explain himself, Jesus answers the question – with this story – that the Pharisees are muttering to themselves – “Why does this fellow eat with sinners and welcome them?” At the very same time, it answers an unstated question by the tax collectors and those called sinners – “Why is this fellow eating with us and welcoming us?”

Isn't it interesting that we don't really hear about the reaction to this story by the other 98 sheep? They apparently just keep grazing and huddling together, without knowledge that the Shepherd left them alone to go look for this one. Were they angry? Afraid? Were they humbled? Reassured? Could they have possibly been inspired or encouraged? We really are left to decide for ourselves what the other 98 were experiencing.

1 Corinthians 12:26 talks about the Body of Christ. Paul says here: “If one member suffers, all suffer with it. If one is honored, all rejoice together with it.” In the Message version on the front cover today, it reads, “If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing.” Would the Pharisees and Scribes be able to look past tradition to see the hurt of the others? Would they notice that they are the 98, and that Jesus came for those humbled by the world living in the darker corners and begin to let go of their overconfidence of faith?

Jesus' whole mission that he introduces again in this parable is to have people on both sides of the table look across at each other and realize that whatever they originally thought, they all belong there, that only Jesus, and this NEW Kingdom of Heaven he introduces could make that possible. A conversation this week with our new interns, Elysee and Kat, stirred up some thoughts on this for me, hopefully for the three of us. Elysee was remembering Jesus' mission statement that he proclaims. We find it in Luke 4:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

*because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

Based on this, and the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount we just studied – “Blessed are the poor” – Elysee wondered, “What about the rich? How do they stand a chance?” It does seem like the outcasts have special standing and favor when the Lord draws near. God walks away from the 98, from the rich and well taken care of to fill a place in someone's life that has no other resource, no other hope. In our same conversation, Kat remembered being encouraged by this thought: Every one of us has a place in our lives that can *only* be filled by God. This is not reserved for the poor and outcasts. They just don't have so many layers of “stuff” in their lives to shed in order to see this.

It's as if Jesus is asking the 98, “How are you also like these that I've been searching for?”

Okay, let me clear up some math. Some of you are too right brained, and it's driving you crazy that I keep saying the 98 over and over. You assume I'm making a mistake, and you haven't heard a word I've said since I said it the first time, and it's just getting worse! You're thinking, “It's 99! You're leaving someone out of the equation! Get it right!” (Don't fall asleep counting sheep here, we're almost done)...(Actually, maybe it should be the 125. I went to the Dollar Store the other day, and I was so surprised that it was now the \$1.25 store because of inflation! When did that happen?). Moving on.

Here's why I keep saying the 98. Of course, the other sheep are an important part of this parable. It was in fact their question that prompted the story in the first place. The hope is that by some miracle of God's Word combined with the Holy Spirit, that even ONE of the 99 would no longer simply keep grazing on the hill. Perhaps one of the Pharisees or scribes literally got up from the table and went around to the other side and a friendship began with one of the others. All of a sudden, it's not 99 anymore. I have the same prayer. I hope it's me, but if not, I hope it's one of you.

We were at Starbucks the other day. You can find Wendy and me there way too often. She came out to the table where I was sitting and asked if she could buy a drink for a homeless man who had wandered inside to get out of the heat. I'm ashamed to say, I had not even noticed him when I was in there. But she did. 99 became 98 at that moment. When she went to pay for his drink, the baristas wouldn't let her. They covered it. And 98 becomes 97.

If we are the body of Christ, a body that by definition suffers whenever another human being suffers, the way Christ suffered for us, then what will it take for us to join Jesus in his mission to bring good news to poor people, to release captives, to restore sight, to suffer with one who has been oppressed until they know freedom?

When that happens, JOY is possible. And it *must* be shared.

I am really encouraged by someone in our own church that has taken the time to look at the housing crisis here in Sacramento—a traumatic situation that's about to get worse. The 99 became 98 when she dove into deep research, joined community meetings, advocated for better communication, and came away with a heart for those in the Meadowview to Florin neighborhoods that will be feeling this pain the greatest in these next couple of years. No one else seems to be paying attention to these people that will be in the shadows. Our church will be having conversations in the next few months I hope about how to partner with churches and individuals and ministries in that area as the crisis mounts. What if the 99 referred to whole churches and faith communities that could step out of its comfort zone on the other side of the freeway and suffer with an entire city?

On a personal note, I am grateful for a church family that has given me such incredible support for a sabbatical journey I'm about to take in a little less than two weeks. As it approaches, I am sensing more than ever the importance from time to time to take a step away from the usual, away from the 99 to spend time with the one. I get to have one on one time with each of my daughters and my wife in a way that an ordinary life of ministry just does not allow. In the end, I hope it brings joy and

celebration, even while I know that it won't be without its challenges as well. I would love your prayers.

The other day, I was out on a run, and it was 97 degrees. Brilliant choice on my part. As I longed for as much shade as possible, I was running in and out of the shadows, feeling such a difference from one to the other. It gave me an idea to write a song with the title: "In and Out of Shadows." Maybe I'll have some time to give it a try. It's the story of my life really. One moment I'm hiding and in the shadows, even hiding from God. The next, God breaks in, seeks me out, and brings me back into the light. This rhythm is true for most of us. To be able to take some time away, recover gratitude and joy and remember that I, too, am the lost sheep, could possibly be the greatest gift. Only then could I offer this gift to my own family, and with hopefully grace, joy, a bit of laughter and adventure, remind them that God goes with them as well in and out of shadows of life.

God is good all the time. And all the time? [God is good].

I want to end with these thoughts from Ezekiel of all places. The Old Testament. A whole two-thirds of our Bible that many of us look to and think God's character is completely different – vindictive, angry, full of wrath. But what Jesus is portraying about the Kingdom of Heaven here has always been true. Hear these words in Ezekiel (Chapter 34) about what a Good Shepherd looks like (Jesus would have known this):

*"For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will sort them out. <sup>12</sup> As shepherds sort out their flocks when they are among scattered sheep, so I will sort out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them into their own land, and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord*

*God. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak [and sorry, but this last verse is a part of this, so I have to read it, too]...but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.*

When we have come to a place of full self-reliance, we forget the Good News of the Gospel. My prayer as we head into this series on parables is that God will speak to us individually and as a church, and cause us to look across the table, and rather than grumbling about who is also included in this Good News, we will learn to KNEEL inside our canoe, in prayer together, relying more fully on God's grace together as we offer it to others.

Amen.

## **“The Next Step”**

### *A Resource for Life Groups and/or Personal Application*

**The following questions and scriptures are provided for Life Groups and individuals who want to reflect further on today's message.**

1. Read the passage again from Luke 15:1-7. Listen for anything new that you notice.
2. Why do you think Jesus told this parable in response to the Pharisees' grumbling in verse 2?
3. What does this parable seem to be saying about the character of God?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 12:26. Does Paul add anything helpful to the meaning of this parable?
5. Describe your ability to trust in God as a Good Shepherd right now in your own life.

6. Jesus asks if his listeners would leave the 99? Would you?
7. What question is Jesus asking *you* in this passage? How would you respond?

**Table to Table: A question for kids and adults to answer together.**

Do think a shepherd would really leave his whole flock to look for just one? How is this like God?