



March 29/30/31, 2025 4th Sunday in Lent

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **Theme: God's Lost & Found**

1. Am I the lost?

2. Am I the found?

3. Am I the seeker?

Sermon Text: Luke 15: 1-10

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. ⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins^[a] and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Dear fellow friends who need Jesus,

A few days ago, I couldn't find my smartphone. Ok, I admit it. I lost it. When is the last time this has happened to you? I also have to admit, I depend on that smart phone maybe too much because it has my calendar and life connected to it. So you can only imagine how relieved I was to find it again. You have days like that too, don't you? Some days it's the cell phone. Other times, it's car keys, a note with your latest password, or a favorite shirt. Why just recently, I answered a call in the church office from a member who lost his glasses in church. And that's why we have a lost and found box right in the church sanctuary. When we lose something important, we begin to wonder: "Did we carelessly drop it and have no idea where it is? Then, as time goes on, we begin to subscribe to a conspiracy theory: "did we put it somewhere or did someone else move it?" Well, it's one thing to lose a lifeless object. It's quite another to lose something that has life and breath: like a favorite pet or even a child. Picture yourself, the last time you didn't know where your spouse or child was. Your heart can quickly fall deep in the pit of your stomach in fear. In our Gospel lesson for today in Luke chapter 15, Jesus uses a lost sheep and a lost coin to describes **God's Lost & Found**. In each example, something or someone is lost. And in each example, there is great joy when that something or someone is found. I want you to remember that **God's Lost & Found** isn't a box located in heaven filled with abandoned phones or old glasses. Jesus wants us to know about **God's Lost & Found**. This kind of **Lost & Found** describes what every human being is like spiritually-speaking: whether you are young or old, rich or poor, male or female, church member or guest. To help you

understand **God's Lost & Found**, and to really get the point of Jesus' words, ask yourself the following three questions: 1. *Am I the lost?* 2. *Am I the found?* 3. *And am I the seeker?*

First, ask yourself: "*Am I the lost?*" In the 15th chapter of St. Luke, Jesus describes two valuable items that are lost. At the end of our reading we have a coin that's lost. It's an inanimate object and lifeless. It doesn't even know that it's lost. It just sits in the dirt and life goes on. This is really how some people are like in their spiritual lives. They don't even know they're lost in sin. Their names are not written in the book of heaven and they don't know any better. They are just going through life thinking it doesn't matter. This happens to folks right here in New Ulm who won't be attending church this Sunday. This can even happen to members of a church. A man or woman can begin to think that their spiritual life is made up of three parts: pray, pay, and obey. And this business about admitting sin, well that's for someone else. Once upon a time, a church member was complimenting the pastor on his message for that Sunday. He said: "Way to go pastor. Way to give it to *those sinners* this week." See how he totally missed the point?

Jesus also tells us in Luke chapter 15 about a poor sheep that is lost. Now this sheep didn't plan to get lost. He just wandered away from the rest of the flock. Perhaps he got distracted. All of a sudden this woolly creature couldn't find its way back home. He was lost and he was scared. That sheep pictures the way some people are in this life. They know that they're lost, lost in sin. Their guilty consciences remind them of that fact every day. And no amount of good deeds done can give them the peace and forgiveness that's available freely from Jesus. Now they didn't plan on being lost. But, lost they are, and they don't know the way back to God or how to have their names written in the book of heaven.

When Jesus conducted his 3-year public ministry, He reached out to all people. He reached out to the ones who were ready to listen and those who didn't. He reached out to those inside the church who thought they didn't need a Savior from sin. And He reached out to those outside the church who thought they could never have a Savior. Jesus summed up His ministry for us when ***He said in Luke 19: For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*** When Jesus met the Pharisees and teachers of the law, they failed to realize that they were spiritually lost. They didn't want to hear the truth, that their personal sins separated them from God. In thinking that they weren't lost, they saw no need for Jesus. But, in doing so, they rejected Him and so rejected their place in heaven. My friends, this is where we need to double check our soul's condition. Do we realize that the reason Jesus came to planet earth, was because we were lost? It doesn't really matter if we didn't know it like that lost coin, or if we wandered away at some point like the lost sheep of the parable. Each of us, including you and me, were lost spiritually at some point. The prophet Isaiah was right when He said: ***We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way (Isaiah 53:6).***

Just think if we could have milk cartons that would have the faces of people that were spiritually lost? Imagine you are pouring a glass of milk in the morning. And where a picture of a lost child has been printed, our own face would appear with the note: “spiritually lost?” Wouldn’t that be something? Wouldn’t that be a vivid reminder during those days we try to live without the LORD Jesus, and simply go our own way?

That brings us to question number 2: *Am I the Found?* Jesus tells the joy of a shepherd who finds his sheep and of the woman who finds her coin. But, in both cases Jesus says: ***In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over ONE sinner who repents.*** When a rescue mission needs to take place, the one who does the rescuing, should be trained and equipped for the task. Every so often in the news, we may hear of someone who tries to rescue another, only to tragically die in the process. Well, when it comes to **God’s Lost & Found**, we have one named Jesus who did die while rescuing us. But, that wasn’t the end of the story, was it? Yes, Jesus died horribly on a cross. But, He didn’t lose. He won by earning heaven for every sinner by paying the penalty for our sins: death. His resurrection from the grave proved His victory for all to see. Now, Jesus, our Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us, His sheep, desperately looks for us.

It’s easy to play spiritual games with our Savior. And there’s a real spiritual danger in doing that. In asking the question: *Am I Found?*, we all need to stop and seriously reflect on these words how: there is joy over one sinner who repents. Some sinners love staying lost. They think they can live without returning to the shepherd. But, that’s not the repentance Jesus is talking about here. Repentance is making a spiritual U-turn, changing from going the wrong way to God’s way. When our Good Shepherd calls us in the Bible, he wants us to see how hopeless life without Him really is. He wants us to turn away from our personal sins and turn back to Him. It’s true. The rescue mission of Jesus took Him to the cradle, to the cross and to the empty tomb. But, He also wants to be in our hearts in our priorities. Jesus wants to turn our thinking to realize once and for all how good it is to be a sheep in His flock, a coin in His purse, and a child in His home.

Maybe we should ask ourselves the question, have I brought joy to the angels in heaven lately? Yes, even Christians struggle with sin. I do and you do too. But, even as Christians we have a daily need to repent, to turn to the cross of Jesus and say: “God be merciful to me a sinner, for Jesus’ sake.” And because of His amazing Grace, His undeserved love, we can truly sing: “I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.

We could end this sermon now. But, then an important part of Jesus message would be lost. Luke chapter 15 began with people who were critical of Jesus’ willingness to meet and eat with sinners. Remember what our reading said: ***But, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” THEN, Jesus told them this parable.*** These men had no love for others. They made no effort to reach out to them. They lost God’s loving attitude for

sinners. And God wants us to find it. That's all part of **God's Lost & Found**. That's what we mean in asking the final question: *Am I the Seeker?*

In the past, we can see what entire communities will do when a child is lost. We learn how they will post on social media, donate generously, and organize searches. They will personally walk through woods & swamps, shoulder to shoulder to find a missing child. We can see the hours, the energy, and the tears and prayers that people will spend just for one child.

But, I want to ask you: "who will take up the search for lost souls?" Is that someone else's responsibility? Do we just delegate it to a few people here at *St. Paul's*? Do we really care? Maybe we're concerned that some of these "lost souls" wouldn't fit in here at our church? Are they the wrong kind of sinners? Are they so much worse than we are? Surprisingly, these words of Jesus weren't told to people outside the church. They were told to the people inside the church. Jesus wanted us to know that God doesn't love us for WHO we are: the good guys. He loves us, in spite of our sins. Jesus loves every sinner, the sinner on the street corner and the sinners that sometimes have self-righteous attitudes that sometimes we have. You see, *St. Paul's* is not a country-club for sinners, but a hospital for saints.

As we reflect on that Amazing Grace, Grace that found us, may we both collectively and individually take up the search for lost souls. May we love others the same way that God has loved us. May we give generously. May we shoulder to shoulder, walk through streets and neighborhoods, to reach out, not only to missing children, but to missing souls whom Jesus died for. May we truly be the seekers.

The next time you lose something and find it again, I hope you think of **God's Lost & Found**. And may we be part of the reason the angels in heaven have so much joy. Amen.