

Sept. 12, 2010, Luke 15:1-10

## Looking for the Lost

Last Sunday evening we had a birthday party for my mom. My sister and brother-in-law and their two kids came down from LA. Our son was here. My uncle and aunt came. They had been visiting up in Oregon and northern California all summer. They were on their way back to Mexico where they live, so they stopped and spent the night with us before heading home

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In the morning they got up and they were getting ready to go. Aunt Vickie couldn't find her phone! My cousin Lori had called Sunday night and we all had taken a turn talking to her and the phone had gotten misplaced in the process.

That phone is my aunt and uncle's only way of keeping in touch with everyone! Even at home in Mexico, they have no phone at their house. Worse yet, they don't have any way set up to get mail, so it wasn't an option for me to mail it to them whenever I might happen to find it.

That phone is important to them! You might even say that it's crucial, that they can't live without it!

So we all looked for it. We looked and we looked. We called it to see if we could hear it ring. I called my sister to see if she might have taken it with her by accident. We were nearly in a state of panic trying to find that phone!

I wonder if the shepherd found himself fighting back panic the same way when he realized he only had 99 out of 100 sheep? I can imagine him heading away from the rest of the sheep in the wilderness, in the dark,

frantic to find that single animal before a lion found it, or before it fell down a cliff and was killed.

I can imagine him calling it by name, hoping to hear a bleat in return so that he could tell where to look.

The woman, on the other hand, was looking for a coin. It couldn't bleat to get her attention. While the sheep was kind of like the lost cell phone that would ring when you called the number, the coin was more like the cell phone was turned off or silenced or maybe the battery had died.

The woman had to rely on her actions alone, on her own eyes alone. The only help she could hope for besides her eyesight was that if she swept that coin she might be able to hear it as it scooted or rolled along the floor.

The sheep was lost outside the flock, outside of the fold. You might say that he had never been to church, never known the love of Christ, never heard the good news that God loves him.

And God, the good shepherd, looked and looked for him, never giving up on finding him.

The coin, on the other hand, was lost inside the house. You might say that she had lost her faith after years of going to church, that somehow something had happened that made her question that the love of God was real and personal. All the rest of the coins were still fine, still assured of the love of Christ, still able to find peace and joy, but not the lost coin.

Still, even though she had fallen away into a crack or under the refrigerator or somewhere, God looked and looked, not stopping until the lost coin was back with the rest of them, loved and secure in the grace of God.

The sheep and the coin did not ask to be found. They didn't pray to be found. God had created them and was looking for them all along. They were important to God, and when they were found, there was a PARTY to celebrate that they were back where they belonged!

The scripture tells us that all of the angels of heaven rejoice when the one who was lost is found! God himself celebrates!

This morning we celebrate the baptism of Dennin. Many denominations do not baptize infants because they are too young to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They believe that a person has to be of a certain age, the Age of Decision, before they can be baptized.

Other people believe that unless a baby is baptized, if the worst happens, that soul will go to hell, unredeemed and lost.

In the United Methodist Church we believe that the grace of God is with us from birth and even before, that God loves us and cares for us and will not let us stay lost. God created us to be his beloved children and reaches out to us in love.

In baptism, it's not about what **we** do. It's not our decision, it's God's! The sacrament does not signify that we have chosen to follow Christ. It signifies that we recognize that each one of us is a beloved child of God, that God has created us in love and reaches out to us in grace.

Like the sheep or the coin, we do not need to ask to be found. God goes out into the darkness of this world to find us. God sweeps away the dirt of the world to reclaim us.

And this happens over and over throughout our lives. Even if we are not aware that we are lost, even if we don't realize it, God is there with us.

We don't think that little babies are sinners, lost from the flock. We believe that they are members of the family of God right from the beginning.

Baptism is an acknowledgement that God is always present in our lives, always loving us, always claiming us as beloved children.

When we baptized Dennin this morning, all of us promised to help him grow in faith and in the knowledge of God and Christ. We promised to live in such a way that he would know the love of God in his life.

God is present already in Dennin's life, and we have promised to continue to make God's love incarnate---embodied--- for him.



And just as we promise this during a baptism, we are always that for each other---the embodiment, the incarnation of the love of God, the hands and feet and heart of Christ who loves us.

God seeks us and finds us, in the dark and dusty places, but we are the ones who live that out for each other and for the rest of the world. When one of us is missing, the rest of us look until we are all together again. When one person out of billions of people does not know the love of God, we can help them understand that God is looking for them, that God is with them.

And when one person turns to God, when they come back to the family of God, we have a party!

Last Monday morning, when we were all looking so frantically for Aunt Vickie's phone, we were all voicing our anxiety and concern.

Where could it be? What could have happened to it? What will we do if we can't find it?! Then suddenly Vickie got very quiet. We turned and looked at her. She held up the phone and then we all let out a great cheer! The party began!

Today we will have a party to celebrate the baptism of Dennin! But let's not forget to celebrate that we have found each other by the grace of God in the love of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit! After all, the angels in heaven are celebrating! We should join them!

Hallelujah!

Amen!