

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

September 11, 2022 (Proper 19, Year C)
Luke 15:1-10

I love the story of Armon, a six-year-old whose school collapsed after an earthquake in Turkey. His father ran to the school and couldn't believe the devastation he saw there. It didn't look like ANYONE could have survived. But he knew where Armon's school class should be in the rubble, and he started digging and lifting broken bricks off of the spot where he thought his child might be.

Eventually people started giving up the search, but Armon's father dug through the night. After 30 hours, friends and rescue workers tried to persuade him to give up the dig, but he would always say, "Either join me or leave me alone."

After 40-some hours and bloody hands, the father finally heard a faint voice. It was Armon, "Daddy is that you?" Then Armon shouted to the OTHER trapped kids WITH him, "See, I told you my daddy would find us!"

Wouldn't it be great to have someone like Armon's daddy spending every day looking for us, looking for the value in us, and never stopping until they found all of it? We do. We have a Savior. And if any Pharisee tries to say we're not WORTH it, he says, "Either join me or leave me alone."

I'm reminded of OTHER searches. I remember the event we have the anniversary of today – September 11th. Do you remember THAT search? There were hundreds of people searching. Many had been there for days. Some of them worked for 2 or 3 days without quitting. Some of them even worked without gloves or masks. ALL of them risked their lives. All they KNEW was that their brothers and sisters were DOWN there somewhere, lost, and they would have done ANYTHING to find even ONE of those lost ones—just ONE survivor. Just one, and their efforts would have been worth it. And can you imagine how HAPPY they'd have been if they had FOUND a survivor?

There are echoes here of MORE searches. How many times in the last few years have we heard stories of parents who watched HELPLESSLY as their children were swept away by raging flood-waters? How would THOSE searchers feel to find a survivor?

At times like these, we feel lost. That's why these parables today are so powerful. Some say it seems OUTRAGEOUS for a shepherd to LEAVE the 99 behind to look for just ONE. They say it seems EXTRAVAGANT for a woman to spend so much time and effort looking for just ONE coin. But not if it's YOURS.

How do you feel when you lose your PHONE? When you lose your keys? Your wallet? Your reading glasses? You are CONSUMED by the search, overwhelmed, frantic. And those are just THINGS. What if you lose a PERSON, a CHILD? YOUR child?

WE are that lost child, that lost sheep, that lost coin. We GET lost, mixed up, turned around. We despair, we make mistakes. We get separated from the ones we love, unable to find the way BACK to where we BELONG. We get LOST.

Sometimes we WANDER away, not INTENDING to get lost; we just NIBBLE our way lost, all engrossed in a particular interest or hunger.

And sometimes we get brushed OFF or bumped aside by OTHERS.

Whatever the cause, we DO get lost sometimes. We get separated from our Savior. We feel alienated from the family of God.

And Jesus tells us that God would do ANYTHING to FIND us, just ONE of us. ONE life is that important. If you ask rescue workers, it's even worth risking your LIFE for. And if you ask JESUS, it's even worth DYING for.

The NUMBERS in these stories are significant. In the Bible, the numbers 100 and 10 are numbers of fullness or completeness; the numbers 99 and 9 are INCOMPLETE. These parables go with the story right after them in Luke, the parable of the LOST SON. THREE (as in a father and two

sons) is ALSO a complete number, but any family with a child MISSING is INCOMPLETE. I've visited with ELDERLY parents who STILL have an empty hole in their heart over the death of a child. Even a mother who only carried her baby a few months – she will never be the same. As I've said many times, it's unnatural for a parent to bury their CHILD.

That's how GOD feels about each and every one of you, EVERY ONE of you. God is a Shepherd in search of the ONE lost sheep. God is a woman searching in the dark, in the crevasses, for ONE coin. God will literally turn this world upside down in his search for ONE lost soul. We have a RESTLESS God, a RELENTLESS God, who won't abide the loss of ANYONE, NOT EVEN ONE.

Jesus is concerned about YOU. We have a God who is so personal, that there's an ACHE in God's heart for even ONE person.

We sing Amazing Grace, but have you ever considered just HOW AMAZING it IS? Surrounded by billions of light years of space, among millions upon millions of people, God is ready to lay aside everything else, and devote every ounce of God's power, every DROP of God's love to seeking and finding and saving ONE who is lost. That one is so enormously PRECIOUS to God that, so long as they are UNACCOUNTED for, there's an incompleteness, an unrest, an ACHE in God's heart that will never end until that ONE is back where they belong. This is an AMAZING truth – GOD, the creator and master of the universe, is INCOMPLETE, without YOU.

And so is the church, the family of God. WE are incomplete without YOU. We FEEL that LOSS for every family who has moved away, or moved on, or passed away. We feel their absence. We NEED EACH and EVERY ONE of you.

You see, ALONE, we are lost, but GOD FINDS us. In this place, and at this font, and at this table, our GOD FINDS us, and comforts us, and puts us on his shoulders, and carries our burdens. We once were lost, but now we are found.

And I'm thankful. I'm thankful that our God will NOT give up on us, not on me, and not on you. God will NEVER give up. EVER.

Hear our Lord's words, with all the angels in heaven, "COME, REJOICE with me, for I have FOUND the one that was lost!" Amen.