

Who is Jesus?

Luke 15:1-7

"Lost people matter to God, therefore they matter to us" is our first and most important core value at St. John. Jesus constantly reminded his followers of his mission to reach those who were far from God. Who are the modern "Lost" and what does it take to find them?

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "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? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was 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. Luke 15:1-7

For Personal Study

Do you take offense when someone else gets a reward or favor they don't deserve? The scribes and Pharisees took great offense at Jesus because he associated with sinners and treated them graciously. The Pharisees had strict regulations about how they were to keep away from sinners. They were shocked with the way in which Jesus freely received sinners and ate with them. Sinners, nonetheless, were drawn to Jesus to hear him speak about the mercy of God. Jesus characteristically answered the Pharisees' charge with a parable or lesson drawn from everyday life.

What does Jesus' story about a lost sheep tell us about God and his kingdom? Shepherds

normally counted their sheep at the end of the day to make sure all were accounted for. Since sheep by their very nature are very social, an isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered and even neurotic. The shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out and not merely mourned. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God. Seekers of the lost are much needed today. Do you persistently pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

For Group Discussion

- How does Jesus' parable of the sheep relate to the muttering of the Pharisees? What is Jesus' point?
- How does this story make you feel about your value to God?
- Have you ever strayed from the Christian faith? If so, how did God bring you back?
- How could this story affect your relationships with those you know who are wandering from the faith?



For further reading

Saving a Fallen World (Luke),
by Michael Bentley

A Simple Guide to the Way Back Home by Luke Sutton

The Shepherd and the 100 Sheep by Michael Hudak
(children)

Daily Reflections

This week's Study Guide is designed to help you begin the process of spiritual discernment as you seek to know God's will. You will be blessed as you spend time each day in prayer and reflection on the scriptures.

Monday, May 22

How does God look at "sinners and tax collectors"? Read Luke 15:1-7. In these verses God is the shepherd. To what lengths is God willing to go to bring back the lost? How would you describe the heart of God, when one lost sheep comes back to his fold? Spend the next ten minutes in prayer. As you pray ask God to touch the hearts of each member of our church that we might be willing to sacrifice in order to continue to reach God's lost sheep.

Tuesday, May 23

Begin your devotional time by praying John Wesley's "covenant prayer": *I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee*

or brought low by thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. Amen. Read Luke 15:11-32. This is perhaps the most loved of all of Jesus' parables. God is the father. And we are one or the other of the sons. Have you ever been the prodigal who stepped away from God and pursued your own way? What was it like to come back to him? Have you ever felt like the son who resented the father's grace and joy at the prodigal's return? What was the father's response to the faithful son's frustration? What does God want us to know and feel as we who are Christians read this parable?

Wednesday, May 24

Begin your devotion time in prayer, thanking God for the blessings in your life, naming the blessings in your prayer. The Bible teaches us that God blesses us so that we might be a blessing to others. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 where Paul teaches the Corinthians about giving.

Thursday, May 25

As you begin your devotion time, spend time considering St. John's vision statement – "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ, Growing in Faith, Hope, & Love." Is there part of this vision that you find most exciting? Is there some way you would like to help in pursuing this vision? What vision do you have for how God might use our church family in the future? Read Acts 1:1-8. What is Jesus asking of you in this passage? What is he asking of our church?

Friday, May 26

During your devotion time today pray once more for direction, inviting God to guide you as you consider your role in God's Plans, Our Hands. Pray for Pastor Hamilton and our leaders of this effort, that God will use them to inspire others. Read Luke 8:36-50. What does this story teach us about the heart of Jesus? What are its implications for our church family? For you?