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17th Sunday after Pentecost
15 September 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 15:1-10

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Some people are known for losing things.

My college roommate, and later best man in my wedding is one of these people.

In fact, we hung a sign in the hallway of our dorm that said, in big, bold letters,

“Joe, do you have your keys?”

One time I remember walking up and down the street looking for his ID.

Another person like this is Nikki’s step-father.

Earlier this week he lost his phone in the airport terminal on his way to Texas.

The problem is that he only knew how to access his work e-mail from the phone,

which, of course, had his airline ticket information for the rest of the trip.

Thankfully Nikki was able to contact the airline for him and get it all sorted out.

Every family has a story of leaving someone behind—

either a child at church, or the baby in the house, or, like I did a few months ago,

driving off from a gas station somewhere near the Colorado border without one of
the high-schoolers.

It happens, to all of us: keys, phones, wallets, glasses, and so forth.

We have a habit of losing things.

I remember losing things as a kid, a basketball card, my homework, anything, really.

My parents would ask, “Is it where you left it last?”

I’d say “No,” of course.

And then they’d say something like, “Well it didn’t just walk off, now did it?”

Sometimes things are lost because we’ve forgotten where we’ve put them.

In those cases, it’s not that the thing got lost on its own, but that *we* lost them.

There are others, though, that can walk off.

There are some who would rather *not* be found:

a child that runs away from an abusive or neglectful home;

an ashamed teenager who finds out she’s pregnant and doesn’t know what to do;

those who wrestles with depression, even to the point of suicide.

Sometimes we lose ourselves;

and it can either be intentional and full of anger,

or because we just can’t get it together.

Both are in today’s Gospel.

The woman’s lost coin didn’t get up and walk away.

But the sheep did.

And we're to see ourselves as both of these: lost, and yet forgiven, sinners.

Jesus tells these lost-and-found stories to explain to the Pharisees and Scribes why *He receives tax collectors and sinners and eats with them*. (Lk 15:1-2)

He does this because he knows that most of us are like the Pharisees.

We cut our losses and focus on our gains.

We rejoice in what we have, not in what we've lost and then found.

We ignore the littlest, the least, and the difficult to get along with.

Some people are just lost—and to be perfectly honest, they're not worth the effort.

That's how it was for the Pharisees and the sinners.

There was a divide: us and them, rich and poor, clean and unclean,
and ultimately, *in and out*.

Sinners are the lost, poor, worthless, and—according to anyone's records—they're on the outs.

They know it, too.

Some went the way of prostitution, trying to feed their fatherless children.

Others bowed the knee to Caesar, and took Jewish money from Jewish people for Roman gain.

Some tried, but just couldn't keep up.

The Law was too hard, too strict, too demanding, and they were just too weak.

That was then; and it's no different than today.

We still have the two classes:

the ins and the outs, the right and the wrong, those making it, and those giving up.

There are many *sinners* out there, who are still lost.

And as soon as you get past your Pharisaical pride, you'll realize you're one of them too.

Now, some might be lost because someone has misplaced them—

that is, they might have been led astray, taught false doctrine, been driven off by cruelty,
or any of the countless other reasons we hear for people not being in Church.

They might've been wrongly accused, born into a pagan family, or surrounded with lies.

They might not have known their sin; worse yet, they might never have heard of Jesus.

Whether you think it's fair or not, they're still lost—much like the woman's coin.

Then there are sinners who are lost because they don't want to be found—they run.

Some are angry—both with the teachings they've heard and the people they've met.

Some have been hurt and blame the Church, or God, or both.

Some simply refuse to give up their sin, thinking they'll be fine.

And then some don't know any better and just do what feels good at the moment.

Like the sheep that follows its nose, or flees the rod—they're lost too.

Now when something's lost, our favorite thing to do is blame someone.

We blame ourselves for stupid decisions and a lack of self-control.

We blame our husbands for not looking at the map.

We blame our children for being children and not remembering where they played with it last.

We blame God when He doesn't seem to play fair.

We'll blame whoever we can, so that in the end, it's not our fault.

But blame never finds what is lost.

In today's Gospel there's no word about the woman beating herself up over the lost coin.

There's no scolding of the sheep, as it rests on the shepherd's shoulders.

There's no blame.

In fact, there's no *anger*, no wrath.

All we see in today's Gospel is our God searching high and low for us.

The Lord is the old woman who sweeps the floor and lifts the couch cushion, looking *for you*.

The Lord is the shepherd, *my* Shepherd, who tracks down His wandering sheep.

And when He finds His lost sheep He tosses it on His shoulders and brings it home—

the Lord brings *you* home—

to a table He has prepared for you, where your cup runs over.

It's all done with joy.

He Himself does all the work.

And you—you are most repentant as you rest on the shoulders of Jesus.

And I tell you, "*there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who rests on the shoulders of Jesus, than over 99 righteous persons who need no Jesus.*"

You are lost in your sin—whether forgotten by someone else, or wandering off on your own—
but you're found in Jesus, baptized *into* Christ.

Our Lord does His finding and saving through His Word.

And with the way we are, we're never just found and rejoiced over once—
but continuously.

Today our Lord finds you again, tosses you on His shoulders, and carries you home—
and He does it at this altar.

Here is the feast of celebration—with angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven.

Here the lost are found, sinners forgiven, and joy abounds.

Come, our Lord says, "*Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit