

Perhaps the biggest mystery to ever confound mankind is: Where do all those lost, separated socks, go? How does that happen, anyway? Where **do** those missing socks go during the laundry process? The world may never know. But actually, I guess it really shouldn't come as a surprise that socks get separated from one another. After all, one always has to be right so the other left. Get it? (Pause for a possible courtesy laugh ☺) I used to have a few more jokes about pairs of socks, but ... I've lost them. (Pause again ☺) I understand if this subject doesn't come across as funny though, because the pain of losing a sock is...unpairable!

But seriously, compared to a lost sock, a sheep or a silver a coin is **much** more valuable, and a human being, of course, is even **more** valuable yet. So, how can **lost people** get matched up with Jesus Christ? That's the focus of our Gospel lesson this morning. Let's take a look

The Good Shepherd stands as the crowds flock to Him. What a wilderness this is! There's a big crowd there, a gathering of two very different groups. On the one hand, a flock of Pharisees stands aloof, watching this Shepherd, Jesus to see what He does. On the other hand, there's a group of people with very bad reputations; tax collectors and sinners. They're the undesirables. Pharisees and

tax collectors- you'll never find two groups more opposite than these, but both have something in common, they're both lost sheep in need of a shepherd.

So, it comes as no surprise when the grumbling begins among the Pharisees: "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." They've been looking for proof to bring official charges against Jesus, and His association with *those* people might be something they can use. After all, if He really is the Savior, holy and righteous, why would He be eating with such unholy and unrighteous people as these? "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus responds with a couple of parables, earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Here's the first:

<sup>4</sup> "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> 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."

**That's** the story of a **dedicated** Shepherd. When one sheep is discovered to be lost, He leaves the other 99 and goes after it. Sheep don't last long on

their own; they'll either eat the wrong plants or get gobbled up by a predator. With no sense of direction, they're not going to find their way back to the Shepherd, so the Shepherd has to go to them. And notice how the story continues: Once the Shepherd finds the sheep, He carries it home. When He arrives home, He holds a **party**- maybe a **meal**- to rejoice that the lost sheep is found.

So, Jesus tells the crowd what His mission is. He isn't there to save people who don't need salvation. He's there to save the **lost**. He hasn't come to die for those who don't need forgiveness, but to redeem those who do. And when a sinner repents by the grace of God, even the angels in heaven rejoice.

Who's who in the crowd of Pharisees and "sinners"? Except for Jesus, there isn't anyone in that crowd who's **not** a sinner! When Jesus speaks for the "ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance," there **aren't** any such 99 to be found. Both the Pharisees **and** the tax collectors are lost sheep, but there's an important difference. The Pharisees believe that they're righteous. They don't think they need Jesus and forgiveness. They believe that by their own works they are pleasing to God. In other words, they don't believe they **need** a Savior. They're sheep who don't believe they need a shepherd to lead them; they're actually only willing to acknowledge Jesus if He follows

**them!** So really, **they** are a lot more lost than the so-called “sinners” that are there. Those tax collectors and sinners, on the other hand, know they have nothing about themselves that will impress the Savior. They’ve lived sinful lives, and they admit it. They need help they don’t deserve, and that’s why they’ve gathered around the Good Shepherd. It’s really a strange reversal that day; angels and archangels rejoice over tax collectors and sinners, because they are repentant sinners who eat in the Lord’s presence. As for the Pharisees, they refuse that table; and duly warned, they are the 99 left in the wilderness while the Good Shepherd goes to care for those who confess their need for Him.

Jesus tells a second parable:

“<sup>8</sup>“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This time it’s a woman in her house, missing one coin out of ten. It’s a precious coin worth a day’s wages, so she sweeps and searches with lighted lamp. When she finds the coin, she celebrates with her friends and neighbors.

Now that she has found the coin, she proceeds to spend a good chunk of its worth! *It's not good business sense, but this isn't business.*

*It's the salvation of souls.* That bears repeating: "This isn't business. It's the salvation of souls.

I'd like you to please take out your church bulletin. Notice how on the top of page 2 it reads: "First Lutheran Church and School: Sharing Christ, Changing Lives." That lines up very well with what Jesus says in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." **That** is the work of Christ's church, "Sharing Christ and Changing Lives." Notice our mission statement is not: "Saving Money and Balancing Budgets." Rather, it's "Sharing Christ, Changing Lives". Once again, like the woman celebrating over the lost coin, this isn't business, it's the salvation of souls we are to be about here at First Lutheran. Does it make sense that *all* of heaven would rejoice over the repentance of *one* sinner? No, **but that's how precious each person is**, so that's what the angels do and it's what we should do, too. You may put your bulletins away, thank you.

By the way, who do you think this woman represent? Is it Jesus? Maybe, but maybe not. Often times in the Bible, the *church* is pictured as a woman- as

the bride of Christ, and penitent sinners are the ones in the house of the Lord. It could be then that Jesus is talking about the on-going mission of the Church: By the light of His Word, we proclaim the Good News about Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One. We go after those who are lost or who have wandered away. Those who hear and believe are then found and gathered into the house, and so the angels rejoice again. And sadly, those who do not hear or will not believe will remain in the dust, to which they shall return.

But thanks be to God, this day we rejoice, along with the angels, that Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who comes to seek and to save the lost.

People like you and me! Christ has died and risen for you. **You** are found.

The Good Shepherd has gathered **you** in. Today, as you confess your sins, angels rejoice over your confession. Why? Because the angels always rejoice in the work of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. He has carried our sin and unworthiness to the cross. He defeated it there. So that He may bear you on His shoulders to heaven, He has borne your cross and paid that price. He has found you, saved you, and now feeds and tends to you by His Word and Sacraments. Nothing can snatch you out of His hand. Your eternal life is now certain.

But be careful that you don't wander away again from your Shepherd. Sometimes Christians will grow tired of the Lord's heavenly feast of Word and Sacrament, and they simply stop coming to church. But sheep that wander away quickly stop being part of the flock. If you isolate yourself from the Lord's means of grace, you are depriving yourself of His forgiveness. You're also filling yourself with other things, other thoughts and teachings, that cannot save. It makes you easy prey for the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion, who seeks to devour you and me.

Just like there's many wrong paths to take in a corn maze, as I talked about last Sunday, so too, there are *many* ways to be lost in the wilderness, because the gate is wide, and the path is broad that leads to destruction. But this is not you, here, now. No, your Good Shepherd has faithfully gathered you here, to His flock. He has led you by the still waters of your Baptism. There He says, "I have called you by name and placed My Name on you. You are not lost, because I have found you." He speaks His Word to you, and by that Word He continues to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. When you are spooked by prowling anxiety or doubt, the Shepherd's Word of grace still holds true- you are His, even if you don't necessarily feel it. And as Jesus ate with

those tax collectors and sinners, so He invites you to His meal: He gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

So, on this day, you and I can rejoice with the angels and archangels over the repentance Jesus has given to you and me. Jesus, your Good Shepherd rose again so that by His Word and Sacraments He has found you! Amen