



Sept. 15, 2019 Lk. 15: 1-10 & Ex. 32: 7-14

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Fr. Robert Beck ([subscription](#))

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Back in the 4th Sunday of Lent we encountered the two sons of the prodigal father in Lk. 15. Today in the alternate reading we pick up on the part of that chapter that we omitted then, that of the lost sheep and the lost coin. Lost and found. The theme of today's reading. Jesus presents us with an image of God that refuses to let anyone or anything go without endless offers of restoration. When we too "come to our senses" we realize that life in one long progression of offers of unconditional

love. We must reject all those images of God that are smaller than this one if we are to accept Jesus' understanding of God. Like the people in this parable, he wants everyone to "rejoice with me" that the one who thought they were lost, were never truly lost to God, and only lost in their too small understanding of God.

LK 15:1-32

1. The **tax collectors** and the **sinners** were all gathering around Jesus to hear him, 2. at which the **Pharisees** and the **scribes** murmured, "This man welcomes **sinners** and eats with them." 3 Then he addressed this parable to them: 4 suppose **one of you** has a **hundred sheep** and **loses one** of them. Does he not leave the **ninety-nine** in the open country and go after the **lost sheep** until he **finds** it? 5 And when he finds it, he **joyfully** puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his **friends** and **neighbors** together and says, '**Rejoice** with me; I have **found** my **lost** sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more **rejoicing** in heaven over **one** sinner who **repents** than over **ninety-nine** righteous persons who do not need to **repent**. 8 Or suppose a **woman** has **ten silver coins** and **loses one**. Does she not **light a lamp**, **sweep the house** and **search** carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she **finds** it, she calls her **friends** and **neighbors** together and says, '**Rejoice** with me; I have found my **lost** coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is **rejoicing** in the presence of the angels of God over **one sinner** who **repents**."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus teaches that God will stop at nothing to find anyone that is lost. Does this reassure you or distress you?

PRAYER: And so / by every fire and shore, / in market place and on hillside, / with the children of the street / and the masters of the law / Jesus told stories of God / which were really stories of people / ...who were searching with the eyes of God / like a housewife atwit, / her money somewhere but where, / scouring the house with a candle when / suddenly / the coin leaps from its hiding place / into her eye. / or who were laughing with the mouth of God / like shepherds, / their beards dripping beer, / retelling the story of the lost lamb / suddenly / found and slung / over the returning shoulders of joy. Lord, please give me a loving heart that can rejoice with God when someone who was lost is found. Amen.

Shea, John. [Stories of Faith](#). Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1980, Page 203-4.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

COLLECTORS / SINNERS: Tax collectors and sinners were examples of the wrong kind of living. They were hovering around Jesus, listening to his teachings and watching what he was doing.

Why do you think they were doing this?

PHARISEES / SCRIBES: Pharisees and scribes were examples of the right kind of living. They were also hovering around Jesus, listening to his teachings and watching what he was doing.

Why do you think they were doing this?

ONE OF YOU / WOMAN: Since a male audience is assumed, those listening are addressed 'as one of you'. In order to include the entire human race in his examples, Jesus now includes the example of a woman.

How do you think his audience received this inclusiveness? Have you ever experienced being somewhere where you were grateful for being included? What do you remember about how that felt?

HUNDRED / NINETY-NINE / ONE / TEN: A hundred/ninety-nine sheep would indicate a medium sized flock of someone who probably had to do their own work. Ten coins would be an example of a modest dowry, but also represent all that a woman had for her 'social security'. The number 99 often represented superhuman creations such as angels, and one would represent humanity. *How do these numbers help you to get the point of the parables? What do they indicate about the people in the examples?*

LOSES / LOST / FOUND / FINDS: Finding and loosing seems to be the main issue in this chapter of Luke. Jesus teaches that God will stop at nothing to search out what is missing and bring it to God's self. *Do you trust that this truth includes everyone? What new information about God do these examples teach?*



JOYFULLY / REJOICE / REJOICING: Joy and rejoicing is the proper response to the restoration of wholeness in whatever was fragmented. This is a God's eye view of how things should be in Jesus' teaching. *Have you ever experienced the response of a group when their "black sheep" finally responded to unconditional care? Did anyone resent all that extra attention that this 'sinner' received? Can you think of a story or joke that included a deathbed conversion? If so, are people rejoicing or complaining that the person got off easy?*

FRIENDS / NEIGHBORS: All those who live close, and those who care about the man or woman who has lost something, are to share in the joy of the restoration of that which was lost. *Have you or someone you know ever been invited to such a party? If so, what was it like?*

SHEEP / COINS: Sheep and coins are symbols for that which enabled people to take care of their basic needs. A coin in a woman's dowry may not be laid aside, even in her sleep. *What makes these two examples such powerful teaching tools?*

LIGHTS A LAMP / SWEEP THE HOUSE / SEARCH: To sweep the house (See picture below), or to search the hillsides, entails concerted effort on the part of the one who has lost something. A church (hillside/ house), whose unholiness is hidden from the light, spreads judgment not mercy, and condemns in others what is unacknowledged in itself.

How can this insight help to identify places for repentance?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 15:2-7 // Mt. 9:10-13; Lk. 15:3 // Lk. 19:7; Lk. 15:4f // Mt. 18:12ff; Lk. 15:7 // Lk. 19:10; Ezek. 18:23; 33:11;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Ex. 32: 7-14; [Ps. 51: 3-4, 12-19](#); 1 Tim. 1: 12-17; Lk. 15: 1-10; or 1-32; Revised Common Lectionary: Jer. 4:11-2, 22-28; [Ps. 14](#); 1 Tim. 1:12-17; Lk. 15:1-10;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

"Joy is the simplest form of gratitude," Karl Barth.

Finally, and most significantly, the parallel male and female images do not picture divine action in parental terms. The old woman seeking the lost coin and the woman leavening the flour image God not as a mother or father (Creator), but as seeker of the lost and transformer of history (Redeemer). Ruether Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk*. Boston. Beacon Press. 1983. Page 68.

Perhaps the greatest resistance comes from our efforts to find the missing parts of our personalities, which are there but have been lost to our conscious life. And so like the woman in Luke 15 vv. 8-9 who has lost that special coin which completed the pledge of her husband's love and loyalty, we search and search for those parts of ourselves which have been misplaced or which lie somewhere in our unconscious gathering dust. Such searching is a necessary part of the recovery of the self. This recovery may involve a penetrating illumination of the dark and hidden parts of ourselves and a thorough sweeping out of the inner world. In this work there are resources of spirituality which we may have in our anxiety overlooked.

Rock, Stanley A. *The Promise and Challenge of Resistance*. The Journal of Pastoral Care, Summer 1993, Vol. 47, No. 2. Pages 131.

A rabbinic tradition cautions: "Let not a person associate with sinners even to bring them near to the Torah" (*Mekilta 57b on Ex. 18:1*). Feeding sinners is praiseworthy; eating with them is forbidden. Jesus routinely deals with opponents by insulting them plainly and directly. The central characters of the twin parables are deeply offensive to the Pharisees. Jesus sarcastically asks the Pharisees, "Which *one of you*, having a hundred sheep and losing one...?"

Shepherds. For all their rich symbolism in Scripture, shepherds were considered by the Pharisees as unclean, members of a despised and forbidden profession.

Women. It would have been an unpardonable insult if Jesus had said to this group of oriental men: "Which *woman* of you...?" so he abbreviates and generalizes his question: "Which woman losing a coin...?"

Pilch, John J. The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle C. Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press. 1997. Page 136.

Yet tsror in Hebrew means a pebble. In ancient times, shepherds needed a system to keep track of their flocks. On some days, they would go out to pasture with a flock of 30; on others, a flock of 10. Memory was an unreliable way of keeping tabs on the number of the flock. As a result, the shepherd would carry a sling over his shoulder, and in it he would keep the number of pebbles that corresponded to the number in his flock. That way he could at all times have an accurate daily count. When we place stones on the grave and inscribe the motto above on the stone, we are asking God to keep the departed soul in His sling. Among all the souls whom God has to watch over, we wish to add the name--the "pebble"--of the soul of our departed.

There is another element to this lesson. When God provides this bounty of good things for the people, he does it for people who are not all that good. They are grumbling and complaining, speaking out against God. God does not hold that against them. God loves without condition. God gives to them in spite of their lack of goodness. This is a lesson that is important for us to learn also. We do not deserve what God gives to us. We are sinners. In spite of that, God continues to pour forth blessings upon us. God never stops loving us, no matter what we do or how we act. That is a tremendous change that must come about in our own thinking and in our own hearts. Bp. Thomas Gumbleton.

Am I somewhat repelled by the proposed teacher? Move on. That small voice inside called intuition, hunch, or conscience is more reliable than any other and needs to be respected. Never follow what your inner voice opposes- new knowledge comes only through consent, and when I hear what is true, an agreement reverberates inside me. It's as though I always knew...and only just now remembered. Pg. 10. Lillian Firestone. How to Find a Spiritual Teacher. Fall. Parabola

Real believers in the Word of God by their faith become the real living loving presence of God, doing the wondrous works of God by their immediate sacramental presence, not as a remote link in a chain of causality. Page 116.

Parr, Raymond. Process Person Presence. Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1990.

Nolan, commenting on Jesus' table fellowship (Lk. 15: 1-2) from the perspective of his guests, declares that "It would be impossible to overestimate the impact these meals must have had upon the poor and sinners. By accepting them as friends and equals Jesus had taken away their share, humiliation and guilt. Pg. 94.

Peters, Dr. Carmichael. A Gadamerian Reading of Karl Rahner's Theology of Grace and Freedom. NY. Catholic Scholars Press. 2000

Fr. Beck teaches: Authentic celebration takes us beyond ourselves into our shared life, and how we share that life in God as well.

When we think about Jesus as that exceptional, unusual person who lived long ago and whose life and words continue to inspire us, we might avoid the realization that Jesus wants us to be like him. Jesus himself keeps saying in many ways that he, the Beloved Child of God, came to reveal to us that we too are God's beloved children, loved with the same unconditional divine love. John writes to his people: "You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children - which is what we are." (1 John 3:1). This is the great challenge of the spiritual life: to claim the identity of Jesus for ourselves and to say: "We are the living Christ today!" Henri Nouwen

Shepherding is among the oldest occupations, beginning some 5,000 years ago in Asia Minor. Sheep were kept for their milk, meat and especially their wool. Over the next thousand years, sheep and shepherding spread throughout Eurasia. Henri Fleisch tentatively suggested the Shepherd Neolithic industry of Lebanon may date to the Epipaleolithic and that it may have been used by one of the first cultures of nomadic shepherds in the Beqaa Valley. Some sheep were integrated in the family farm along with other animals such as chickens and pigs. To maintain a large flock, the sheep must be able to move from pasture to pasture. This required the development of an occupation separate from that of the farmer. The duty of shepherds was to keep their flock intact, protect it from predators and guide it to market areas in time for shearing. In ancient times, shepherds also commonly milked their sheep, and made cheese from this milk; few shepherds still do this today.

In many societies, shepherds were an important part of the economy. Unlike farmers, shepherds were often wage earners, being paid to watch the sheep of others. Shepherds also lived apart from society, being largely nomadic. It was mainly a job of solitary males without children, and new shepherds thus needed to be recruited externally. Shepherds were most often the younger sons of farming peasants who did not inherit any land. In other societies, each family would have a family member to shepherd its flock, often a child, youth or an elder who couldn't help much with harder work; these shepherds were fully integrated in society. Shepherds would normally work in groups either looking after one large flock, or each bringing their own and merging their responsibilities. They would live in small cabins, often shared with their sheep, and would buy food from local communities. Less often shepherds lived in covered wagons that traveled with their flocks.

Shepherding developed only in certain areas. In the lowlands and river valleys, it was far more efficient to grow grain and cereals than to allow sheep to graze, thus the raising of sheep was confined to rugged and mountainous areas. In pre-modern times shepherding was thus centered on regions such as the Middle East, Greece, the Pyrenees, the Carpathian Mountains, and Scotland.

There is a custom among shepherds in Israel that existed at the time of Jesus and is still practiced today that needs to be understood in order to appreciate the Good Shepherd text. Sometimes very early on in the life of a lamb, a shepherd senses that it is going to be a congenital stray that will forever be drifting away from the herd. What that shepherd does then is deliberately break its leg so that he has to carry it until its leg is healed. By that time, the lamb has become so attached to the shepherd that it never strays again. 200-1 Rolheiser, Ronald. Against an Infinite Horizon. NY. Crossroad Pub. 2001

Lost Coin Women's Fund, Inc. (LCWF) supports academic opportunities for low-income Massachusetts women by providing Grants for undergraduate studies or vocational training programs. It is well recognized that higher education leads to an improved quality of life for women.

Lost Sheep story

For the in-depth insights into the role of the shepherd read: A Shepherd Looks at Ps. 23 by W.P. Keller. As a shepherd, Phillip Keller shares his insights into the life and character of sheep---and of the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for them. This beloved classic will give new meaning to the ageless Shepherd Psalm, enriching your trust in and love for the Lord who watches closely over you.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle C 2012. Pgs.162-165.

benShea, Noah. Jacob the Baker. NY.Villard Books, 1989. . THE ARROGANCE OF IGNORANCE: Page 29-30.

White, William R. Stories For the Journey. Minneapolis, MN. Augsburg Pub. House. 1988. THE MAGIC RING: Page54

COMPASSION: PG. 55. A MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSION: PG 56; CAUGHT IN THE ACT: 56FF.

Quoist, Michel. Prayers. NY.Sheed & Ward. 1963. . SIN:Pages134-7. (Lk. 15:7)

SOMETHING FOR HIS FILE

Bad luck—the light turned red, and I was trapped standing at the comet I prayed for it to change quickly

“Can I have something for my file, mister?” he asked.

This one was a crazy—no doubt about it. The grimy box under his arm gave him away immediately. Crazies always carry something, usually a shopping bag with handles. They can be unstable, but this guy baked pretty safe. “Sorry no money!” I had repeated the old lie so often it came out automatically. I halt expected to hear myself say, “This is a recording. Please shove off and don’t try again” “Have you got anything for my file?” he repeated.

Slowly the message sank through. I fished in my pocket, pulled out a brochure, and handed it to him.

“No!” he shouted. Then, almost pathetically, he insisted, “I don’t have a file

I took it back and turned away. Come on light—change. I stepped over the curb to look for a break in traffic.

“I’m Howard,” he said. “What’s your name?”

“Mark” One syllable was all the information I intended to give. I had no desire to have some crazy calling me all the time. I knew people who’d had to change their telephone number to stop the calls. I liked my number. I chanced a quick look to see what he was doing. He had a pencil in one hand, and was stooping to pick up a piece of I paper. Just then the light changed, and I took off. Halfway down the block, I slowed down and looked back. The crazy had just closed his box and begun to look around for a new victim.

A few days later; I was walking the same route when I noticed an ambulance parked outside a dingy alley. I joined the crowd of onlookers to see what had happened. Two attendants in white jackets wheeled their stretcher out of the alley. It was the crazy. His face was showing, so I knew he wasn’t dead. But as the attendants shut the door I could tell by their conversation that he wouldn’t stay uncovered for long.

A policeman questioned some of the people in the crowd, but received no answers. Nobody seemed to care that much, not even the cop. It was just a little added excitement on an otherwise dull day. The cop raised his voice and asked, “Did anyone know this guy?” Nobody answered. Finally I volunteered. “His name is Howard.”

The people mound me backed away— as if my knowing the crazy’s name made me a crazy too. The cop came over and began to pump me for more information. “His name is Howard. That’s all I know, sir.”

“Well, at least there’ll be a name for the headstone. Thank you for your help Oh, by the way – would you take this for me?” He reached down and picked up: the crazy’s box.

“You’ve done more for him than anyone else, and I don’t went to fill out all the paperwork for a box of garbage.” He shoved the box into my hands and. waked away before I could say anything. Why should I want some guy’s garbage? I thought. I looked around for a trashcan, but I knew I couldn’t just toss the box. Maybe it was the stories of misers who had thousands of dollars yet lived like bums, or perhaps even a slightly misguided sense of loyalty to the human race. Whatever it was, I opened the box. I was disappointed. I saw nothing but old clothes and one file folder. No wonder this guy didn’t have a file for my brochure. I guess even crazies are into specialization. I pulled out the file and dumped the rest of the stuff. Then I noticed the crude printing on the folder: “FRIENDS.” I opened it and looked inside. It held only one small scrap of paper. On it was written, “Mark.”

Ted Brooks, Zion, IL