



TOUCH POINT

Who Are the Lost Sheep? – Touchpoint for September 7, 2022

Luke 15:1-10 (The Message) ¹⁻³ *By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, “He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.”*

Their grumbling triggered this story. ⁴⁻⁷ “Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

⁸⁻¹⁰ “Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently.”

You have to picture the scene. Jesus is talking and the people of disputable reputations gather round him. When he moves to a different location, they follow him. When he walks down the street to the market, they follow him. When he walks outside the gates of the town, they follow him.

If you are going to present a 1st century description of this scene, you might say they are a bunch of sheep and Jesus is their shepherd. He moves here. They follow. He goes there. They follow.

A bunch of sheep following their shepherd and hanging on his every word. They are his flock. They are sheep of his fold. He seems to care and have compassion for them.

But one day as he is wandering around with his sheep, some high and mighty religious folk wander on over. You know, the pillars of the community. You know, you and me! And they call to Jesus, “Hey Jesus, come over here. We need to talk to you.”

And he goes. He leaves his sheep behind. He tells them to stay put. Stay in their fold, their pen. It’s not that they would go out anyway. They would never be welcomed amongst the proper people of the day. That is much too dangerous for them.

I wonder how that crowd of undesirables felt. Being left behind. Having Jesus run off like that. Would the religious leaders devour him? Would they change Jesus’ mind? What would become of them if he never came back?

So Jesus wanders over to the Spiritual Directors and Faith Mentors, Pastors and Bible Study leaders and says, “What can I help you with?” And they say, “You welcome sinners and eat with them! This cannot stand!”

And Jesus says, “Oh, you mean my rag tag little flock over there? Those people who follow me around like a bunch of lost sheep?”

“Yes. THEM!” comes the reply.

And Jesus answers, “Don’t worry about them. I have left them to come talk to you. Leave them alone.”

And then he tells them a story:

“Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? Kind of like me leaving them and coming over and talking to you ... Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one of you who repents than over those ninety-nine over there who are already following me.”

Ok, he didn’t say it exactly that way, but read between the lines, people.

Who are the lost sheep in this passage? Who are those who are already following Jesus in this story? Who are they? Why, when we read scripture, is it always THOSE people who need to repent? Why is it always THEM?

Look at this story. LOOK AT IT!!!

Who is on the outside? Who has wandered off from Mystery’s grace? And who hears it and sees it as life-giving? So much so, they will follow it wherever it goes and hang on every word.

Our narcissistic, self-centered, navel-gazing spirituality just can’t handle people who live by grace. And hang on Grace’s every word.

We can’t handle people who actually believe God’s grace is bigger than our sin. And live accordingly. We can’t handle people who know they belong before they behave or believe a certain way.

Those people have to get right – with us, our society, our culture, our ways of doing things.

But who are the sheep following the Great Shepherd in this story, and who are those who are not?

Things aren’t always as they seem at first glance.

My friend, Henry Rojas, who I talk about a lot because every time I talk to him my mind explodes in a thousand different directions... Well, Henry is always going off on these rants that seem crazy at first, but then, when you listen and think about them, he starts to make some sense.

Henry likes to say, and this is going to be a paraphrase because I can’t say it as well as he can... He says:

“We don’t have an opioid crisis in our country. We have a reality crisis. We have constructed a society, a culture, a country, that is in such a sorry state that millions of people think being on drugs or alcohol is a better alternative to living in what we have created. We shouldn’t be saying, ‘Oh, look at those poor, lost, and weak people.’ We should be looking at ourselves. We who are at the top of society should be asking ourselves what kind of society we have created that would make them turn in that direction. We need to listen to them. We need to hear from them. They can tell us where we are so off base.”

And then he concludes with this powerful image:

“They are the light of the world. They are our hope to a new way of living together.”

It doesn’t sound too different from Jesus saying, **“Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who weep and mourn in this world.”** To them Jesus says, **“You are the light of the world.”**

Yep, that's right. Jesus' immediate words after the beatitudes in Matthew's gospel are to those very same people:

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.”

Let me ask you a question: In a society based on competition, what happens to people who prefer to cooperate? In a society where, according to Gordon Gekko, “Greed is good,” what happens to people for whom a simple life or a balanced life is most desired? In a society based on individualism, what happens to people who prefer to live in community, to live for others?

Soren Kierkegaard once said, “A starving man can describe a meal much better than one with a full belly.” Or something to that effect.

So who do we need to listen to, to better understand how to fix the ills of society? Those who stand at the top of the sick society and prosper from it? Or those who have experienced the sickness to the core of their being?

It's not always as it seems, is it?

Look at this story. LOOK AT IT!

Who's in the fold and who isn't? Who hears Grace's every word and follows it? Who are those who need to repent and who are those who are already rejoicing in meeting the Great Shepherd?

Look at this story. LOOK AT IT!

And know this, even when you wander off, whether it be into the so-called ‘sins of the flesh,’ or in the case of today's story, into ‘the sins of religious holiness and self-righteousness’...

Know this: The Mystery will come and hunt you down. Come looking for you. And you will know Grace has always been with you. Whether you left the fold because of earthly entanglements or left the fold due to your pursuit of the height of spiritual piety.

Either one can make you wander away from your fellow sheep and Mystery's Grace. But Grace keeps walking right along with you.

Because, you see, Grace will follow you – even when you don't follow Her.

Kind of like this meal, in the night in which Jesus was betrayed, denied and run away from... I'd call that a wandering off, wouldn't you?

You see, when Judas and Peter and Thomas and the rest stopped following Him and started wandering off, He started following them. He put a tracking device in them. *“Take and eat. Take and drink. This is me. Now in you.”*

Because, you see, Grace will follow you – even when you don't follow Her.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.

Still me Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all the tumult within me cease.

Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Healer of Our Every Ill

(Marty Haugen)

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow.

Give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

You who know our fears and sadness. Grace us with your peace and gladness.

Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts. *Refrain*

In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding

Give us all your vision God of love. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.