

## THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Week #2 of a 4-Week Series, "Parables of the Bible"

Rev. Richard Maraj

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*So this school teacher was teaching his grade one class about whales when a little girl raised her hand. And she said, "Teacher, whales can swallow people can't they?"*

*And he said, "No, actually they can't. While they're so much bigger than human beings, their throats are too small so they really can't swallow human beings."*

*And the little girl said, "Well, my Sunday school teacher told me that Jonah was swallowed by a whale."*

*And the teacher who was an atheist said, "Well, your teacher's wrong. Your Sunday school teacher's wrong, and it's impossible for a whale to swallow a human being."*

*The little girl says, "Well, when I get to heaven, I'm going to ask Jonah myself if he was swallowed by a whale."*

*And the teacher, again a little irritated, said, "Well, suppose Jonah went to hell?"*

*And the little girl says, "Well, then you can ask him." [Congregants laugh]*

So today, we continue with Part #2 of our four-week series on Jesus' parables. And, as you know, parables are simple stories about common things -- you know, like candles and lost coins or mustard seeds -- that help reveal a deeper spiritual lesson, a deeper spiritual message. And once you're able to go deeper and get that message, we have a greater understanding and awareness and can have a deeper experience of the kingdom of heaven right here and now.

Last week, we looked at the Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, which is about having faith in the seeds of possibility; trusting in that process of growth that takes time to unfold and enjoying the harvest.

Today, we're going to look at the Parable of the Lost Sheep, which appears in the book of Luke, Chapter 15, Verses three to seven. And here's what it says:

*"And then he told them a parable. 'Which of you, having a hundred sheep, and losing one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And 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 lost sheep.' Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.'"*

And so, at the time, the Pharisees and scribes were kind of upset at Jesus for hanging out with tax collectors and sinners, and even welcoming them to come and listen to him speak. And so, Jesus responded with this to show that God absolutely loves and welcomes everyone into the kingdom of heaven. That everyone is important; everyone is valuable; everyone is worthy, including sinners; including tax collectors. And even atheist school teachers are welcome in the kingdom of heaven. [Congregants laugh]

And he uses the analogy of that relationship between sheep and a shepherd to really show that the shepherd -- that God -- loves all 100 ... all of his sheep, all his children. And that there is rejoicing and celebrating when someone repents and returns back to God to feel that sense of wholeness and that sense of connection, that sense of oneness.

And so that makes sense! And that is a good lesson. But there's an even deeper level when we begin to look at it from a metaphysical point of view.

And looking at things metaphysically -- in the Bible, you know -- it comes with the idea that all the stories in the Bible represent some experience or struggle that we have on our journey to the full realization of our spiritual quest to know our oneness with God. And that every character that is in a story represents some aspect within ourselves.

And so the lost sheep represents something in us that feels lost. You know, something in us where we feel like we're not worthy; that we're not enough. Something in us that is still in pain from the past trauma or drama.

And then the 100 sheep represents the wholeness and the fullness of life, you know. And then, the 99 sheep represents all of our blessings, but that part of us that feels like something's missing. That feels that, even though I've got so much, you know, that something feels empty and unfulfilled in me.

And then, the shepherd really represents that Christ spirit -- God's Spirit and divine nature within ourselves -- and our capacity for love and caring and compassion. Our capacity to listen to that guidance and to be able to be provided for.

And then the final one is that there's rejoicing in heaven. Now, we believe that heaven is a state of consciousness. And to say that there is rejoicing in heaven means that our consciousness is being raised to a greater awareness of God, and a greater awareness of joy and the good that is in our lives.

And so, when I was in seminary, Rev. James Dillett Freeman, who was the director of the seminary for 20 years and also director of Silent Unity for a number of years ... He's the one who wrote the Prayer Protection that we say every week. He wrote that in 1941. Interestingly, in 1969, somehow Buzz Aldrin, the astronaut, got ahold of a Prayer of Protection card and took it up in Apollo 11. Isn't that cool? And then Apollo 15 Captain James Irwin got one of his prayers, called "I Am There," and actually left it on the moon. There is a Unity prayer on the moon! So, Unity is, like, beyond the planet! It is, like, universal. [Congregants laugh]

And so, we're listening to the guy. And, at the time, he was like 85 years old. I mean, he's like one of the icons and legends of Unity. And so, we're like listening to every word he says. And then there's this Q&A, and somebody asked him the question, *"What is one thing that you've really learned about life in all your studies?"*

And, of course, we're the church of positive, practical Christianity. I'm expecting something positive and mystical and amazing that we've never heard before. And he pauses, and then he says, *"One thing I've learned is that every single human being is hurting in some way. That every person is dealing with something that they inside that they need to heal."* And he said, *"Because of that, every one of us needs to have compassion towards everyone, including ourselves. Because of that, we need to realize that this life journey -- this spiritual journey that we're on -- a part of that journey is to do our healing work."*

That lost sheep represents some part in us that is wounded; you know, some part of us that feels alone; some part of us that still has the pain of rejection or abandonment or abuse. You know, some part of us that is living in shame or feeling deep levels of regret. You know, there's some woundedness that we just have not healed or resolved.

And we human beings have a tendency to want to bury these things and cover them up and stuff them and not deal with them. Or we sometimes hold on to the victim story and keep blaming our parents or blaming whoever for whatever pain that we might be going through. But what happens is this long-lost part tends to spill over and affect our ability to enjoy the rest of "the 99," because it is so profound.

Let me give you an example. How many people have heard of the boxer, Sugar Ray Leonard? Anybody? So, everybody knows he was an Olympic gold champion. He won titles in five different weight classes. Phenomenal boxer! And he was good looking, and he was charming, and he was smart, and he's rich, and he's famous and successful. Everything you could think of! He had "the 100"! He had the "full meal deal" of the kind of life that we all dream of.

Except it wasn't 100; it was a 99. Because there was something in him that was affecting his ability to feel a sense of peace; to feel a sense of joy and really enjoying the fullness of the incredible life that he had. You know, he started drinking and he was on cocaine. He was all doing all these destructive things. And yet, his life looked so perfect; it looked so amazing. And it was not until he was in his 50s that did he acknowledge and say out loud and get help, because he was sexually abused as a young kid learning boxing. That he had to deal with the sense of betrayal that an adult -- who was supposed to take care of him -- violated him in the worst way possible. He had to deal with the shame; he had to deal with the anger.

Now, he could have kept drinking and covering up, but he knew that that lost sheep: that there was something in him that was literally preventing him and affecting him from enjoying the fullness of his life. So, he got help and did the therapy; did that work to try and bring himself to a greater level of healing and a greater level of wholeness. He knew his lost sheep. And he knew that that needed to be brought into a sense of wholeness and be healed for him to truly enjoy the fullness of his life.

I absolutely believe that every single one of us is here to bring more light and love into this world. To bring more joy; to bring more goodness; to bring more kindness and happiness. That we are here to make a difference. We are here to help others. And we are also here to heal something deep within ourselves. There is something we need to release and let go; something we need to change; to discover; and to transform so that we could know the fullness of the goodness and the glory of God and the kingdom of heaven right here.

This morning, I want to talk about three important lessons I believe that this Parable of the Lost Sheep teaches us.

And the first one is to **RECOGNIZE WHERE WE ARE LOST** and where and what is hurting within us. You know, to find what is lost, we need to know what's lost! And so, we need to pay attention. And sometimes we need to ask ourselves some important questions, like: Where in my life am I hurting? What in me is feeling empty or feeling lost? So, what pain from my past is still affecting my peace and happiness today? And what is it in me that I know it is time for me to face? Time for me to deal with? Time for me to get help and do some healing?

You know, everybody knows the power of silence. I think silence is an incredible thing. When Scripture says, "*Be still and know that I am God,*" amazing things happen in stillness and in silence. We open ourselves to feel a sense of peace and open ourselves to feel the presence and inspiration of God. We open ourselves to be a greater channel of God.

But I also believe that silence is a revealer and a healer. I've told you many times that I went on a silent retreat for 10 days. And we did 11 hours of meditation! There was no speaking the whole week, but 11 hours of focus-concentrated meditation in the silence. And I felt peace, and I felt all this. And they actually predicted, that by the sixth or seventh day, that your "stuff" will start coming up.

And it started coming up. And I wasn't feeling good. You'd think, "*Oh, meditation! Silence! I should be feeling great!*" No! Feeling horrible, because all this stuff that we buried starts coming up. And, you know, immediately we think, "*Oh, I just want to stuff it down.*" But they're saying, "*You just got to keep doing it.*" Because your soul wants to unearth all that stuff so you could be more whole; so you could

feel a greater connection to God. Several people left the retreat, because dealing with their own silence and their own mind was too painful. And they left. You know, silence is a powerful thing. It is a revealer and a healer.

So in this thing, they tell you that, between 12 and 1 every day, you can have a five-minute counseling session or connection with the guru. There was a male and a female. And so, I went to my person and I said, "You know. I'm really struggling. This stuff's coming up." And he said, "You're doing good work. Keep it up. Have a nice day." [Congregants laugh]

And so, I'm thinking, "Brother, I'm supposed to get five minutes. You didn't even give me one!" [Congregants laugh] And the truth is, I knew that was the truth! But I've got to tell you: when we go through this process, sometimes we need some reassurance. Sometimes we need someone coaching or supporting us and just saying, "Keep going. You're doing good work. It's uncomfortable, but that's part of the process."

And so, the thing is that, for all of us, we have got to ask ourselves: Am I willing to go to that place? To that shadow place; to that place where I feel wounded? That place that I don't even want to go to, to allow myself to be liberated from it? To allow that sheep to come in to feel a greater sense of wholeness and connection?

In Unity, we want to focus on the 99% of all the good stuff that's going on. And that's good to a certain extent, but not when that one lost sheep is impacting our peace of mind and our ability to enjoy that 99. That making sense, everybody? I mean it's a powerful and important thing. We have things that are repressed in us. I was amazed the things that came up in me and the level of peace that I felt, you know, as I re-entered into my life.

And sometimes your life looks exactly the same, but inside you have changed. And how you see it, how you show up in it, how you feel and enjoy the experiences of life are richer and deeper. But you've got to go through that, and you've got to be willing to find that lost sheep.

Second one is: you've got to **BE YOUR OWN SHEPHERD**. You know, shepherds support and they protect, and they provide and they guide. And so, we need to be our own. And the shepherd represents that Christ Spirit in us. And so, that Divine in us wants to guide; wants to support and lead, if we allow ourselves to rely on it.

In the parable, it says the shepherd goes after the lost sheep. And to "go after" is not a matter of distance and miles or meters. To "go after" is for us to move from our head to our hearts, and to take that wounded area in us and just surround it in love and to surround it in compassion. It is about bringing it into the light of awareness and God's healing energy. It is a powerful and an important thing for us to do. Not to shame it or push it away or feel bad about it; it's to welcome it and embrace it in God's love, because it is a part of our journey and a part of our healing process.

To allow that shepherd -- that Christ in us -- the most important thing is to reassure us that we're loved. To reassure us that we're cared for. To reassure us that we're valuable. And to reassure us that we are whole, complete, and lacking in nothing. And so that's such an important thing for us is to embrace it with love and compassion.

How many people here would say that sometimes you're kind of hard on yourself? Anybody ever there? How many people ever beat yourself up and almost insult yourself -- like, "I'm such an idiot!" -- when things don't go as great as you'd like? And how many people would agree that you could probably be kinder, more gentle, more caring, and compassionate with yourself? Anybody?

And so, just to be able to get to that place -- to surround things in love and be compassionate with ourselves -- is the beginning of the healing itself. Just to encircle it with love and care and compassion and be loving to ourselves. And to give ourselves the three gifts that we have the hardest time giving ourselves.

The first one is self-acceptance. Sometimes we have a hard time accepting ourselves. We are quick to or to say that we're not good enough or wish we were different than we were. And one of the great healing gifts is the gift of self-acceptance: to accept that who we are is exactly who and how God made us to be.

The second one is self-compassion. You know, again, sometimes we're so brutal on ourselves, it's important to be gentle and understanding of ourselves and what we are doing.

And the third one is self-love. Many of us have kind of been conditioned to believe that love has to be earned; love has to be gained. And sometimes we do that with ourselves. We withhold love from ourselves until we behave or show up or achieve or become something we think we should. And then we'll lavish love on ourselves then.

And so, giving ourselves love, giving ourselves compassion, giving ourselves acceptance is a huge, huge portion of reconnecting and bringing out that lost part of us into a sense of wholeness and oneness.

So, my question for all of us is: Are you willing to be your own shepherd? To be more kind? To be more caring? To be more accepting? To be more compassionate and loving to yourself as you move through the difficult processes in our lives?

You know, somebody sent me a little video thing of the Course of Miracles, Lesson 46. And the affirmation is, "*God is the love through which I forgive.*" And I just don't know why that just hit me. It's so powerful! "*God is the love through which I forgive.*"

And then I realized it could be anything! God is the love through which I let go of the past. God is the love through which I love and accept myself. God is the love through which I am healed. God is the love through which I am blessed.

*"God is the love through which I forgive."*

Together: [with congregation] "*God is the love through which I forgive.*"

Take a deep breath.

*"God is the love through which I let go."*

Together: [with congregation]: "*God is the love through which I let go.*"

Take a deep breath. And "*God is the love through which I am healed.*"

Together: [with congregation] "*God is the love through which I am healed.*"

Take a deep breath. Because ultimately all healing is love. Love is the thing that heals. And the question is: Are we willing to give ourselves that love by being our own shepherd?

And the final one I want to talk about is to **REPENT AND REJOICE IN HEAVEN**. How many people enjoy the incredibly fabulous feeling of finding something you thought was lost? Anybody ever had that? [Congregants laugh] You know, there's been several times where I've lost money. It's like, "*Dang, I'm so mad!*" And then I put on a jacket a couple of days later, put my hand in the pocket, and there's that money! And it almost feels like you win an extra prize! It's almost like a bonus! You know, if we lose a ticket; you lose some jewelry, you find it; it's exciting! It's beautiful and wonderful energy.

And one of the things is: if you really look at it, in the New Testament, one of the themes is seeking and finding. And particularly finding something that was lost: Parable of the Lost Sheep; Parable of the Lost Coin. You know, the Prodigal Son: the guy -- the father -- said, *"My son who was dead is now alive."* It is about finding what was lost; seeking and finding what was lost.

Because sometimes in our lives, you know, we've all experienced lost hope. You know, we lose our faith. You know, we felt that we've lost our patience, or lost our confidence. We've lost our joy. Or sometimes we've lost that lovin' feeling sometimes. [Laughs with congregants]

And so, the thing about it is: what a great feeling when we find our joy; when we find our hope; when we find our faith! When we find it again there is something uplifting and transformative and incredible about that energy. And that's some of the teachings in the New Testament: that we are welcomed into the possibility of finding what was lost; of changing, uplifting, and transforming what we have had into something even greater.

When it says that, *"There will be rejoicing over those who repent,"* it's there will be rejoicing ... Our awareness and our consciousness will get even better when we are willing to do the work to "repent": to change, to expand, to learn and to grow. And to do that inner healing work that we are all being called to do.

Jesus said, *"In this life there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer, for I've overcome the world."* And he's saying, in this life there are trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer, because you can find what was lost. And you can change what is now to something even greater and something even better. You know, the truth is: life is a process -- a spiritual journey of learning; of growing; expanding; of awakening at deeper and greater levels. And we're learning those things through our mistakes; through our losses; through our difficulties; through our failures and our victories, as well.

And so, the thing about it is -- the question is -- for that particular area: What is the work that you need to do to bring about that change? And sometimes it's reaching out and just getting some help. And maybe seeing a therapist; or going to a support group; or joining a prayer group; or doing forgiveness work; or doing journaling. I don't know what it is specifically, but the question is: Are you willing to go deeper and do the work that's needed to create that transformation that brings the change and the level of rejoicing?

Because that change and that repentance comes in raising our consciousness a little bit closer to the Christ consciousness. You know, they always say, like, it's like peeling an onion. Like, healing is like peeling an onion one layer at a time. Like, sometimes these little breakthroughs: they may not seem like a big deal. But our experience of life has changed, and that's a big deal. That level of transformation.

*So this police officer sees this drunk guy on his hands and knees by a street light. He looks like he's looking for something. And then the police officer goes and he starts helping the guy. And he's on his knees; neither of them can find it. And the police officer said, "Are you sure this is where you dropped it?"*

*And the drunk guy said, "No; I dropped my keys in the park."*

*And he said, "Well, why are we searching here?"*

*And he said, "Because the light is much better over here."* [Congregants laugh]

And so, [laughs] We all have an area in our lives that is lost, you know? And so, the question for us is: Are we willing to find what it is that is hurting in us? What that one sheep is that's keeping us distant and stopping our ability from enjoying the 99 other great things in our lives?

And so, are we willing to recognize it? Are we willing to be our own shepherd and give ourselves the love -- the self-love, the self-compassion, self-appreciation? And are we willing to rejoice by doing the work and being able to celebrate the expansion of our consciousness so we can enjoy that 100 percent of the whole and amazing life that God has called us here to live?

And that is the message from the Parable of the Lost Sheep. God bless!

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