

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Lost and Found**

### **Lesson: Luke 15:1-10**

#### ***The Parable of the Lost Sheep***

**15** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup> 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.

#### ***The Parable of the Lost Coin***

<sup>8</sup> "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins<sup>[a]</sup> and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let me share with you a classic joke. One man was grumbling: *"Life is unfair. I lost my car keys at a ball game and never found them. I lost my sunglasses at the beach and never found them. I lost my socks in the washing machine and never found them. I lost three pounds on a diet, but I found them—and five more."*

Have you ever lost something very important in your life? Did you put all your effort into finding it? And if you found it, do you remember the joy you felt? Or, after searching and spending so much time, do you remember the disappointment and sadness of not being able to find it?

**(Slide 1)** When I was a child—though I don't remember exactly how old I was—I think I was about my son's age now, maybe one or two years older. I loved going to the *marketplace* with my mom. I'm not sure if you are familiar with what I mean by "marketplace." I grew up in Seoul. In the mid-to-late

1990s, I don't know if there were the big supermarkets like today. But we used to go to the *marketplace* to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, and meat.

In my memory, that *marketplace* was very large. How can I describe it? It had something in common with a farmer's market, but the one I'm talking about was open almost every day. And not only food, but also restaurants, street food, stationery, shoes, and clothes were all sold together.

I looked up some photos recently. Nowadays in Korea, many of those *marketplaces* have disappeared because of big supermarkets, and the ones that remain are much cleaner and more organized than in the past. **(Slide 2)** But the one in my memory was closer to this: when you walked in, you almost always heard Korean "country music" playing somewhere, the vendors were waving away flies from their vegetables, it was very crowded with people, and many different smells all mixed together in the air.

Anyway, one day, my mom and I went to the *marketplace*. I think it was after kindergarten or school, and I was very sleepy. For some reason that day, I was so sleepy. Holding my mom's hand in that big *marketplace*, I closed my eyes for a moment. When I opened them again, I don't know how much time had passed, but my mom was not beside me.

You can imagine how shocked I was. I looked around and started calling, "Mom, Mom!" Maybe some of you have had a similar experience. You know that strange and scary feeling of suddenly being alone in a big and unfamiliar place, after just a moment ago being safe in your mother's protection.

I went back to the store where I had last been with my mom and asked the shopkeeper if she had seen her. But she said no. When I heard that, I started crying. I don't know how long I cried, but after some time, I heard a voice in the distance: "Hakki! Hakki!" It was my mom's voice, desperately calling my name. Soon we were reunited, and I felt such relief.

Today's passage in Luke tells the parable of the lost sheep. And I wonder—wasn't the shepherd's heart the same as my mom's heart, desperately calling for me? And wasn't the one lost sheep's heart the same as mine, feeling alone, helpless, and scared?

In Jesus' parable, there was a shepherd with one hundred sheep. One day, as he counted, there were only ninety-nine. Perhaps he counted again, thinking he made a mistake. But no matter how many times he counted, there were still only ninety-nine. The moment he realized one was missing, his mind was filled only with thoughts of that lost sheep.

**(Slide 3)** Because he knew the ninety-nine were safe, he went out to search for the one that was lost. He was determined not to stop until he found it. And when he finally discovered the sheep wandering alone, he felt such relief and joy. He put the sheep on his shoulders and carried it home. His joy was so great that he called his friends and neighbors to celebrate with him.

From a worldly perspective, this story doesn't make much sense. After all, ninety-nine were already safe, so why risk leaving them to search for just one? It seems more reasonable to focus on the ninety-nine. That is how people usually think—by what seems rational or practical. But God's perspective is beyond our human calculations.

The shepherd in the story is a good shepherd. He valued the one sheep so highly that he would never ignore or sacrifice it for the ninety-nine. In the same way, our God treasures each and every one of us more than anything else in this world. Especially when something precious is lost—a sheep, a coin, a son—God's heart is filled with care and longing, waiting for it to be found again.

**Lost and Found.** To truly understand this story, I think we need our own experience of losing something very precious and searching for it with all our heart. Because it is often in absence that we realize the true value of what we had. When we are healthy, we do not always value our health. When we are young, we do not realize the gift of youth. When our family and loved ones are with us, sadly, we often take them for granted. Only when they are gone do we realize how precious they truly were.

But God is not like us. God knows our worth even when we are near, and even when we drift far from Him, He is still near to us, longing and waiting for us to return.

When I lost my mom in the *marketplace*, both of our minds were filled only with each other. I would have given anything to find her again, and I believe she felt the same. And when we were reunited, the joy was beyond words.

This is how precious each one of us is to God. Our value cannot be measured by any logic or calculation of this world. Even when we do not know God, even when we are lost and wandering, God is searching for us with a desperate love. Not one sheep, not one soul, does He want to lose. And whenever one of us returns to Him, His joy is greater than anything else.

So today, I ask you—do you ever think of yourself as small or insignificant? Do you judge yourself by the standards of the world, comparing yourself to others, and losing your sense of worth? Remember this: you are a soul that God is desperately seeking. Your value is beyond measure.

And this message also asks us another question. Are there not still “lost sheep” around us—family who left the church, friends who lost their faith, neighbors in despair? With God’s heart for the lost, let us pray for them, reach out to them, and when we do, the kingdom of God begins right here among us.