

God is Joyful
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A Sermon for Pilgrim Church
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash
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We hear the same parable of the lost sheep twice in the gospels, once in Luke and once in Matthew. It's a sign, Biblical scholars say, of shared source material. But Luke and Matthew tell it for different reasons - Luke wants the community to understand why it was that Jesus ministered to such a broad group of people, tax collectors, sinners, not just the upright religious folks. Matthew, on the other hand, wants his community to hear and instruction from Jesus: go searching for the lost - the will of God is that no one should be lost.

But here is something they have in common:
In this common parable, Jesus tells us of God's joy.

Listen for word of God's joy,
And may it be a blessing to you.

From Luke, and from Matthew:

Luke 15:1-10

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1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable: 4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." 7 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. 8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 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." 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Matthew 18

12 What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell

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you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Prayer

Sermon

Let your God love you

Say nothing

Ask nothing

Let your God look upon you.

That is all.

-- Edwina Gately.

There is nowhere we can go where God's love doesn't follow us.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

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No matter where we sheep travel, God the good shepherd will find us.

And that is good news for us,
For like sheep, we wander.

Emmy Kegler says this:

"We have gone unfed, walked without rest, been chased by wolves, and our friends and leaders did not see our pain. But God, in big and little ways, has donned a shepherd's cloak and come running after us. God, in big and little ways, has clambered over rocks and climbed down cliffs. God has found us, hungrier and more hurt and terrified, and cradled us close to say: No matter why you left or where you went, you are mine." (One Coin Found, Kindle Edition)

You are mine, you are precious in my sight, and I love you, God says. (Isaiah 43). God is primarily about love rather than rules, joy rather than anger or fear or impatience (David Lose) and so it is that when God finds us, that is when we find out what God's joy looks like.

In Bible study this week, Jim said, this is a story about joy, and so it is.

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God's nature is to be joyful as she witnesses the beauty of creation that she has breathed forth and called good.

God's nature is to be joyful as she counts each and every hair on our heads. God's joy is impartial, found when each and every one of us is discovered, welcomed, included.

Is the point of this parable to tell us whom God loves, whom God is joyful to find, to welcome, to include?

(That's you, by the way, and you and you and you and...)

Yes, that's the point.

Is the point of the parable to tell us how to love like God, how to be joyful in our searching and seeking, shepherding and sweeping, welcoming and inclusion?

Yes, that's the point, too.

"If Jesus's parables are true, then God isn't in the fold with the ninety-nine insiders. God isn't curled up on her couch polishing the nine coins she's already sure of. God is where the lost things are. God is where lostness reigns.

God is in the darkness of the wilderness, God is in the remotest corners of the house, God is where the search is at its fiercest. Meaning: if I want to find God, I have to

seek the lost. I have to get lost. I have to leave the safety of the inside and venture out. I have to recognize my own lostness, and consent to be found." (Debie Thomas,

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2356-on-lostness>

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That's when God's joy becomes our joy, too.

At a church I used to go to, they started each service by saying:

Because you are here, and you, and you, and you, and you are here, this household of God is whole and perfect.

Let me say it a different way:

Because you have been found, and you, and you, and you, and you have been found,
God is joyful. We are joyful.

Amen.