

God said, *"I am your God, you are My people."*

Last week we heard about God's PURPOSE in sending Jesus, to seek and to save the lost. There are NO exclusions and NO exemptions: sinners and tax collectors, scribes and Pharisees, outsiders and insiders, ALL are welcome in God's house.

"I am your God, you are My people."

In the days before smartphones, MapQuest, GPS and other kinds of electronic FINDERS, a very hardworking businessman was driving to an important meeting. It so happened that he was not only running late, but he was lost. Spotting a young boy on the side of the road, he stopped and asked him, *"Son, which way is it to Dover?"*

"I don't know," said the boy.

"Do you know the way to the main road?"

"Don't know that either," said the boy.

"Well, you don't know much, do you, son?" said the frustrated businessman.

"No," said the boy, *"I don't! But I do know, I'm not the one who is lost!"*

Jesus tells us about God's joy when the LOST are FOUND! We all know how it feels to be lost, disoriented, confused. Whether it is uncertainty about the future, a health issue, financial problems, or the challenges of trying to live and work together, there is no phone smart enough to give us a quick fix. There are those who try to sell us something that will make everything better. But as we read in Book of the Ecclesiastes, *"It is like chasing after the wind."*

Jesus, the master storyteller, uses stories to make the truth jump off the page at us. The truth about how much God loves each and every one of us.

Jesus paints the picture of a shepherd searching for a lost sheep. William Barclay in his Biblical commentary provides a helpful background for this parable. He writes: *"If one was to try to bring 'reason' to this parable, human judgment would label this foolishness. To leave 99 sheep in order to seek and save the one that is lost is bad business and irresponsible. Or to look at it through the lens of faith, could this parable provide a picture of the love of God that is willing to risk everything (even death on a cross) until God finds it?! If people truly matter to God, this story illustrates the relentless pursuit of God who has come to seek and save the lost."*

Like a sheep, we can look up one day and find that we have been so busy eating all the grass we can get, our heads to the ground, that when we do lift up our heads, we realize that we are lost. *"All we like sheep have gone astray."* So often, we have gone astray in ways that seem so harmless or in ways where we feel it is easy to correct our course.

Perhaps this is the most dangerous way we become lost. When we don't even know it! And when we do, we loudly claim our right to be lost with, *"I can do it myself!"*

But we worship a God who in Jesus Christ will never give up looking for us, loving us, and returning us to the flock. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all of my days,"* says the Psalmist. The Good Shepherd cares so much, that He will not stop looking, until He has found. That is exactly what it means when God says, *"I am your God, you are My people."*

We hear the same message in Jesus' story about the woman who loses one of her coins and desperately looks in every nook and cranny of her house to find it. The coin itself was worth about ten days wages. And just like the shepherd looking for the lost sheep, Jesus says the woman will not stop searching until she has found the coin.

We know what it feels like to frantically search for something of great value that is missing. But don't miss the point of this story! When she finds that missing coin, a sigh of relief is not all she does. She throws a party! Celebration! Joy! Community! Everybody knows about the God who rejoices when the lost are found!

Joy is the sound heard in heaven when the lost are found, when the sheep returns to the flock, when the coin is swept up, when the light goes on!

The stories we look at tonight show us a God who stands behind His own slogan: *"I am your God, you are My people."*

To all who are feeling lost, the Shepherd has not given up! He is still searching! He will find!

And to all who are searching for joy, the God of hope and life has already found us and He calls us His own. We can stop running away and start running into the arms of our Savior.

Let us live this Lent as found people, pondering our purpose, and, heading straight for the Resurrection.

And all God's children say,

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!