Luke 15: 1-7 (ESV): The Lost Sheep

Main point: God’s heart always loves and seeks the lost, including us.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus is eating with “sinners.” Luke 15: 1-2: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Background Questions:
1. Who is Jesus hanging around with?
   a. Tax collectors – people who were hated among the Jews for working for the occupying army (the Romans) and skimming off money from their own people
   b. “sinners” – outcasts from society, prostitutes, criminals, etc.
2. Who are the Pharisees and scribes?
   a. The religious rulers of the day, the high class, the “cleaned up,” the “important people”
3. Why are the religious rulers upset with Jesus?
   a. They are shocked and suspicious; think that if Jesus claims to be a religious teacher, he should not be associating with the “unclean”

Focus of the study:
So Jesus told them this parable. “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when the man who lost the sheep has found it, he lays the sheep on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when the man comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 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.”

Questions:
1. What kind of people have sheep?
   a. shepherds
2. Tell me how a shepherd works – what does a shepherd do? What is a shepherd’s job description?
   a. Takes care of sheep. What does that involve?
      i. watches over the sheep, protects them, counts them all to make sure they’re all there, feeds and waters them
   b. How dependent are the sheep on the shepherd?
      i. Completely! Sheep are vulnerable: they have no way to defend themselves, and they’re not very bright (they get lost!)
3. In the story that Jesus tells, how does this particular shepherd act? What happens first?
   a. v. 4: The shepherd starts out with 100 sheep and one gets lost
   b. In the story, does the shepherd wait around to see what happens to the sheep that’s lost? Does he figure, oh well, it’s just 1 out of 100 – it’s OK to lose one ...?
i. No; the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes out to find that one sheep

c. What do you make of the fact that the shepherd leaves the 99 in open country? Do you think a typical shepherd would do this?
   i. No! that’s a risky thing to do

d. Why does this shepherd go find the one sheep that is lost?
   i. Every single one of his sheep is priceless to him, so he goes out to find the one that is most in danger, most vulnerable, most lost

e. How long does the shepherd look for the lost sheep?
   i. Keeps looking until he has found it; doesn’t give up

f. Is the shepherd successful? Why?
   i. Because he doesn’t stop until he’s found the lost sheep

4. What is the shepherd’s reaction when he finds his lost sheep?
   a. v. 5: Puts the sheep on his shoulders – why? Why would you pick up a sheep?
      i. Maybe the sheep is too tired or injured to walk; the shepherd wants to make sure the sheep makes it home, so the shepherd carries the burden

   b. Does the shepherd scold the sheep or punish it for wandering off? No! What is the shepherd’s reaction when he finds that sheep? He rejoices!

   c. v. 6: And then what does the shepherd do? Does he keep his celebration to himself?
      i. No – he calls together his friends and neighbors to join the party

   d. What does the shepherd say to his friends?
      i. “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”

5. So: How does this crazy shepherd feel about his lost sheep?? Is it “just” a sheep, just 1 out of 100, nothing special?
   a. The shepherd loves the lost and found sheep, enough to celebrate with relief and joy when he finds it and to spread his joy to everyone around him

6. Why does Jesus tell this story? Who do you think the shepherd is in this story? And who are we in this story?
   a. God himself is the shepherd
   b. We are the sheep – wandering around, dependent, defenseless, sometimes lost

7. Why were the religious rulers cranky about the company Jesus kept?
   a. The religious rulers didn’t think that sinners, “icky” people, lost people, deserved the love and attention Jesus gave them – that God is too holy to love these people.

8. With this story, what does Jesus say is God’s attitude toward his flock, toward us? What is in God’s heart for people?
   a. So much love that God will do anything to find us and bring us home

9. What about our attitude toward our fellow sheep?
   a. We should act with God’s heart to seek the lost, not give up on anyone, keep looking, keep praying for others
   b. Pope Francis: “God doesn’t know our current throwaway culture. God throws nobody away. God loves everyone, seeks out everyone, everybody – one by one.”

• Ask for any prayer requests for today.
• Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
• End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

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Luke 15: 1-7

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