

HOSPITALITY

Jesus: The Perfect Example of Radical Hospitality

Luke 15: 1-7

September 22 and 23, 2018

The CEO of a very large company called the home of one of his employees about an urgent problem with one of the main computers.

His call was greeted with a child's whispered, "Hello?"

The CEO asked, "Is your Daddy home?" "Yes," whispered the small voice.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked.

To the boss' surprise, the small voice whispered, "No."

The caller persisted, "Is your Mommy there?" "Yes," was the answer.

"May I talk with her?" Again, the small voice whispered, "No."

"Well, is there someone else there I might talk to?" the CEO asked the child.

"Yes," whispered the child, "a policeman." "Well then, may I speak with the policeman?"

"No," whispered the child "he is busy"

"Busy doing what?" asked the boss.

"Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the Fireman," came the whispered answer.

Now the caller was growing concerned and just then he heard what sounded like a helicopter in the background, so he asked, "What is that noise?"

"A helicopter," answered the whispering voice. Alarmed, the boss nearly shouted: "What is going on there?"

In a whispering voice, the child answered, "The search team just landed the helicopter!"

"Why are they there?" The child whispered, "They are looking for me ... they think I'm lost!"

I'm sure we've all lost something very important to us at one time or another. Have you ever lost your wallet? Or maybe your car keys? Left your credit card in the check folder at the restaurant? That lost item becomes the focus of our attention, and I don't know about you, but I can't rest until I've found it.

The story of the lost sheep is the first of three stories that Jesus tells in Luke 15 that are meant to illustrate God's love and some things about how it should work in our lives. All three revolve around something or someone that's lost, being found, or returning.

Jesus tells the stories when a crowd of what the Pharisees would call “undesirables” gather as he teaches, drawing disapproval from the religious leadership. “Which of you,” he begins, “having a hundred sheep and finding one missing, would not go out and look for it and rejoice when you found it? There’s more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents than over 99 who need no repentance.”

I don't know what the first-century Aramaic equivalent of air quotes would have been, but I'll bet Jesus used them to set off the “need no repentance” in that sentence.

The story has a surface meaning that's hard to miss. Jesus wants to reach out to the folks who most need to hear him -- just like the sick need a doctor more than the well do, and the sheep wandering around lost need the shepherd more than the sheep safely in the pen do, the sinners need God more than the “righteous” do.

Of course, the perceptive among us realize we're all lost sheep at one point or another in our lives. We all stray, turning to our own way rather than following God's path for our lives. There will always be a need for repentance.

But there are some aspects of the story that its original listeners would have understood that we might miss. First-century Judea is not twenty-first century anywhere. The shepherd goes to search the *wilderness* for his lost sheep, and that's not just a stroll through beautiful starlit, grassy knolls. There are a lot of things that live in the hills that would love to find fresh mutton on the menu, and it's risky,

because those predators are also willing to sample the slow, two-legged buffet as well.

So, Jesus puts the Pharisees in the shoes of the shepherd. Would you who are in charge of a hundred sheep, risk your life for one that wandered off? Is that one sheep worth the effort? They still have 99 rams and ewes, so they're probably just a few months away from having a hundred sheep again – most likely more.

If Jesus were to tell this story today, he might say, “Which of you, having a thousand dollars and finding your checkbook balance shows a dollar error, would not spend all night balancing and re-balancing it until you found the mistake, and finding it call all your friends and say, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the dollar that I lost!'”

Who would do that? Would you spend the time? How long would you search for that dollar? The reality is most of us wouldn't think a dollar was worth the time and effort.

And this is a deeper message in the story, one that we need to hear just as much if not more than the one on the surface. God does not cut his losses and neither should we. He'll do everything he can, and he won't rest until he finds the ONE sheep that wandered away, and we shouldn't rest either.

During the month of September, we've been learning about radical hospitality and what that should look like as part of

our discipleship journey of faith. Radical hospitality doesn't cut losses.

Bishop Robert Schnase in his book "Five Practices of a Fruitful Congregation" says churches that display radical hospitality are not just "friendly and courteous, instead they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community".

A restlessness because so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community.

In most communities, 40 to 60 percent of people have no relationship to a faith community. That should make our hearts restless. A majority of our neighbors don't know the name of a pastor to call when they face an unexpected grief. Our co-workers don't know the sustaining grace a family of faith offers.

People who repair our cars or serve us in restaurants don't have a forum where they can learn about the essentials of peace, justice, forgiveness, love and unmerited grace. Family friends don't have a faith community that prompts them to service, to take risks for others, and to practice generosity.

Think about how much effort is put into the search for one lost child or into finding a lost boater or hiker. What about a lost pet? There's a restlessness in our souls until they're found. Shouldn't we have that same restlessness for those who are missing in our faith communities?

Let's face it; we're comfortable here, because this is where we feel loved and accepted. But if we're being the church in the way Jesus envisioned the church in this world, we should also feel a bit uncomfortable, restless, if you will. And we should feel such restlessness because we realize so many people we know are not here.

Radical hospitality means that we are ever mindful of who is **not present** in our faith communities: our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers, our family-- and our hearts are restless until that invitation to community is extended and accepted.

Sure, it's easier to cut our losses. Is that friend, that co-worker, that family member really worth the time and effort? It's risky ... we may be ridiculed, or ignored, we might even put our relationships in jeopardy.

Shepherds do go out after their lost sheep, but most of the work shepherds do with sheep is while they're in the flock. Radical hospitality means we pray, plan, prepare, and work toward the purpose of helping others become part of a flock, part of a community, part of a "faith home" where, together, we have the opportunity to experience the radical hospitality of God's saving grace.

Let us pray:

O God, you have welcomed us and shown us how much you value us and love us through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we offer others the same welcome we have received through your grace, remembering that it is your

amazing grace that enables us to reach out in love to others. Help us to let go of our fears and insecurities so that we may boldly follow Jesus' example. Teach us to be a welcoming church that practices Radical Hospitality so that we may draw more and more people into the body of Christ—for your glory alone. Amen.