



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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### “Lost and Found”

Luke 15:1-6, 8-9

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I went through a phase in middle school when I lost things. I lost books, hairbrushes, sunglasses, sweaters. It was a problem.

I trained myself to do better. I trained myself, whenever leaving a room, before walking out the door, to turn around and take a few seconds to scan for lost items. It took time for this to become a habit but it did and was surprisingly effective. In fact, I still do it.

Maybe because I work so hard at this, I get annoyed when I do lose things. The truth is that I don't get annoyed; I get unhinged. I turn the house upside down to find a lost key, a missing sock, a misplaced remote.

And, when I find the lost item, I rejoice greatly and feel really good about myself and about life in general.

Perhaps that is why I am so fond of this morning's passage. Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who has a flock of 100 sheep. That's a lot of sheep. But still the shepherd notices when one goes missing. The flock is incomplete. He seeks out the one that is lost, and then rejoices, throwing a party to celebrate its safe return.<sup>1</sup>

I'm a big fan of the Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen*.<sup>2</sup> I haven't seen it yet but I've listened to the music many times. After the sermon, you will hear a song from this Tony award-winning musical. It is set in high school. The title character is a teenager who struggles with social anxiety. He is so afraid of being ridiculed that he makes himself invisible at school. Which leaves him feeling profoundly isolated and alone. He feels unheard, unseen.

It's one thing to lose something. It's another thing altogether to feel lost. Alone. Uncounted. Like you don't matter. This is how Evan Hansen articulates it:

Have you ever felt like nobody was there?  
Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere?  
Have you ever felt like you could disappear?  
Like you could fall, and no one would hear?<sup>3</sup>

Have you ever felt like that?

I'm betting that every one of us can answer “yes” to that question. Every one of us has felt that way at some point in our life. Here's the good news. And, it's really good news.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the work of Amy-Jill Levine in her book *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, chapter 1: “Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son.”

<sup>2</sup> Playwright: Steven Levenson, Premiere: July 10, 2015: Arena Stage, Washington, D.C., Composers and Lyricists: Benj Pasek, Justin Paul

<sup>3</sup> IBID.

We worship a God who knows how to count.

In today's passage, the shepherd obsessively counts sheep and knows when one is missing and rather than say, "I've still got 99. That's pretty good," this one goes into the wilderness to find the one that's lost.

Why would a shepherd behave in such a way? It doesn't make sense. It doesn't sound like a good business model. But, this shepherd is not interested in running a cost benefit analysis before determining whether to go after the one sheep. The shepherd just wants all of his sheep to be with him. Because every member of the flock matters.

We worship a God who knows how to count.

The truth is that it's incredibly easy to lose track of those who aren't here. Look around. Who isn't here? Who was here last Sunday who is not here this Sunday? It's hard to know, isn't it?

It's easy to lose track of people. Friends, for example. All you have to do is get out of the habit of connecting—if you stop emailing or texting or getting together, if that discipline slips, months, years go by and the friendship is... lost. It's so easy for us to lose track of one another. To feel that no one is keeping track of us.

It's important that others keep track of us. Evan Hansen sings about this in a song called "Disappear."

No one deserves to be forgotten  
No one deserves to fade away  
No one should come and go  
And have no one know he was ever even here  
No one deserves to disappear

The song continues:

Even if you've always been that barely-in-the-background kind of guy  
You still matter  
And even if you're somebody who can't escape the feeling  
That the world's passed you by  
You still matter

No one should flicker out or have any doubt  
That it matters that they are here  
No one deserves to disappear<sup>4</sup>

That song could be sung by the shepherd. That song could be sung by God. This is one of the many ways in which God is different than you and I. God doesn't lose track. Of any of us. The shepherd intimately knows all 100 sheep. I'll be honest—sheep all look the same to me. But, not to the attentive shepherd.

The shepherd knows that the flock is not complete unless all sheep are accounted for. That means that the flock is not complete without you. 2018 graduating seniors, I am talking to you.

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<sup>4</sup> IBID

It's not just about counting. This God doesn't just count. This God cares. Deeply. About each and every member of the flock. You can feel it in how the shepherd searches for the lost sheep: diligently, persistently, lovingly searches and then, when the shepherd finds the lost one, puts it on his shoulders.

How much do you think sheep weigh? A lot, I discovered after a little research. 150 pounds for a small sheep. Adult males can weigh as much as 350 pounds. That's a lot to throw over your shoulders. This is one strong, determined shepherd who knows how important it is to keep the flock together.<sup>5</sup>

Which may be a strange thing to say to you high school graduates in what is a season of loss and letting go. No matter how close you are to your high school friends, no matter how determined you are to stay connected, soon it won't be the same. You won't be going to school together, sitting at the same table at the cafeteria, walking the same halls, sharing the same experiences. This is a season of letting go and making room for new people, new experiences, new freedom. And, freedom is a good thing but freedom, especially at the beginning, can feel a lot like loneliness.

Someday soon, you will be experiencing your first day somewhere else. Perhaps it will be your first day of classes at college. So much will be new and unfamiliar. It will be easy to feel lost, to be lost. Or, maybe you will experience your first day of a new job. So much will be new and unfamiliar. Again, it will be easy to feel lost, to be lost.

On that day, remember that you are loved by a God who knows how to count, who know how to care...for each sheep...each person. Who never loses track of us. Who is in the business of finding those who are lost. That means you can step outside your comfort zone, explore, experience new things, be curious, sit at new tables, confident that God is with you in all that, that God will never, ever lose track of you.

Because you graduates, you are a part of the flock. A flock led by a God who knows how to count. Who doesn't want us to be alone. Who knows that sheep are not meant to be alone, that we do better when we are together. Part of the flock. Right now we are your flock. Whether you see us that way or not. We are your flock. We are here for you. I realize that you may not always be living in Columbus but the church will be just about anywhere you end up. As I have said before, the church is like McDonalds. We have franchises everywhere.

That's a good thing. So that you continue to feel connected to the flock. Because every sheep matters. Graduating seniors, you matter. To God. To us. To the church. To God. To us. To the church.

This flock is not complete without you. Don't be surprised if God goes to enormous lengths to find you.

Last Sunday one of last year's graduates was back in worship. We noticed. We welcomed her home. We hugged her and loved on her and, to be honest, it might have been a bit much but I'm betting that she went home reminded of how much she matters.

We worship a God who knows how to count.

High school graduates, we are not complete without you. So, when you are lost, you will be found. By this God who never loses track of us.

You will be found. Always. You will be found.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheep>