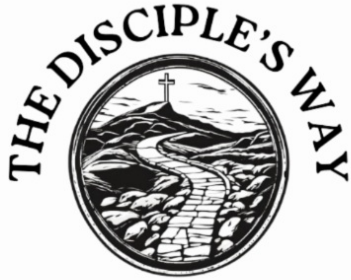




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Christian Formation  
at Christ Church Cathedral

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## Week of June 17, 2024

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### **MONDAY, June 17, 2024 - Ezekiel 34:1-10, Luke 15:1-2**

#### **A trilogy of parables to shepherds who didn't care for the sheep**

Ezekiel prophesied during Israel's exile in Babylon (some 550 years before Christ). Through him, God said Israel's self-absorbed spiritual leaders had failed, being indifferent to what happened to their people. Jesus found leaders like that opposing him. When he reached out to sinners and outcasts, they grumbled about it, showing that they didn't care about those people either. He told them a challenging trilogy of parables in Luke 15.

- What do you think life in God's Kingdom ought to look like? The Pharisees and legal experts believed God looked down on "those people" who didn't act just right, so they thought they ought to snub them, too. But Jesus acted as though God deeply loved all people. Did what you learned early in life about God and "church" agree more with the Pharisees, or with Jesus? How comfortable are you with loving today's "tax collectors and sinners" (including, perhaps, yourself), both inside and outside the church?
- "[Ezekiel's] metaphor goes beyond the normal responsibilities of making sure that the sheep are protected and fed. Instead, it focuses on the remedial duties, caring for the sick and finding the lost. These equate to the need for kings to bring about justice for alienated and disenfranchised people." \* What are some of the ways you actively support and work for justice for alienated or disenfranchised people around you?

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you for touching my life with your love and care, which reaches all people. Thank you for Jesus, who expanded the borders of your Kingdom beyond all our human imagining. Amen.

\* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook: *Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 190424-190426). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

## TUESDAY, June 18, 2024 - Luke 15:3-7

### Parable 1: “I’ve found my lost sheep!”

Jesus told these three stories to the Pharisees and legal experts who grumbled about him mingling with “tax collectors and sinners.” Probably echoing the image from Ezekiel 34, the first story was about a shepherd who lost one sheep from his flock. Unlike the leaders listening to Jesus, this shepherd was not at all indifferent to the loss. He dropped everything, searched until he found the lost sheep—and then threw a party to celebrate finding it.

- Pastor Bruce Larson wrote, “A shepherd once explained to me that sheep nibble their way into lostness. They move from one tuft of green grass to the next, sometimes right through a hole in the fence. When they’re done nibbling, they can’t find the hole and they’re lost. Some of us know what that is—to nibble ourselves bit by bit into the far country.” \* When have you been like the lost sheep, not sure how to find your way home? What “shepherd(s)” has God used to find you and bring you home?
- Have you ever wondered why Jesus spoke of “ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives”? He clearly didn’t mean that the Pharisees and legal experts criticizing him had no need to change. His ironic words pointed out that they didn’t realize they needed to change. Truth is, we all need to keep growing in God’s kingdom. In what areas of your life is God inviting and challenging you today to change and grow?

**Prayer:** O Jesus, thank you for seeking and finding me, for being “thrilled” and placing me on your shoulders! Give me eyes to see others who long for you to find them and to draw them into your great heart of steadfast love. Amen.

\* Bruce Larson, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 26: Luke*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1983, p. 235.

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## WEDNESDAY, June 19, 2024 - Luke 15:8-10

### Parable 2: “I’ve found my lost coin!”

For us, “real” money means paper currency, checks, or bank balances, not coins. Not for this woman: “The ten silver coins are most likely the woman’s *ketubah*, or dowry—the only money she brings into the marriage that is technically hers even if the marriage is dissolved.” \* Each coin was probably worth a day’s wages. In her dimly lit peasant home, with a straw-covered floor, the woman searched carefully until she found the coin. Jesus ended this parable by saying again, “Joy breaks out in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life.”

- Who are your “coins,” the people you value enough to go out of your way to reach out and touch? Is there someone in your sphere of influence (family, friend, co-worker) you particularly sense Jesus calling you to “seek and find”? Ask God to give you a heart that sees the world as God does, that refuses to limit love only to notable or “perfect” people.
- Think of a time when you joined in celebrating big good news for a family member or friend. What was the cause, and what was the celebration like? Have you ever been part of celebrating that someone you care about has “changed both heart and life”? What are your inner feelings if it’s someone you don’t like very much who makes such a change?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, you came in the person of Jesus to seek and save the lost. Come into me each day to touch the lives you are still seeking. Amen.

\* Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, comment on Luke 15:8.

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## THURSDAY, June 20, 2024 - Luke 15:11-24

### **Parable 3: “This son of mine was lost and is found!”**

Losing a sheep or a silver coin was costly. Finding either was cause for joy. But what of a son who chose to be “lost”? Jesus’ story vividly pictured the naive young man rashly using up his resources. Then he finally “came to his senses” (verse 17). And his father was watching for his return: “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion.” The father’s extravagant love embraced him with robe, ring, sandals, and the fattened calf, saying, “This son of mine...was lost and is found!”

- In our culture, we expect children to “grow up and leave home.” But scholar N. T. Wright wrote that in the culture of Jesus’ day, this was a story of shameful behavior, “with the younger son abandoning his obligation to care for his father in his old age.” \* Have you had times when you were like the younger son in Jesus’ story, eager to leave the constraints of your faith behind? What, if anything, helped you to come to your senses and turn homeward?
- Wright also noted that “in a culture where senior figures are far too dignified to run anywhere, this man takes to his heels as soon as he sees his young son dragging himself home.” \* This is one of Jesus’ great pictures of what God is truly like. Do you picture God high up, intimidating, looking down on you sternly? Or do you see him as a loving parent always eager to run to you and throw his arms around you?

**Prayer:** Lord God, sometimes I’m careless, sometimes I’m stubborn. Keep bringing me “to my senses,” making me willing to come home to you, again and again. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, both quotations from p. 188.)

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## FRIDAY, June 21, 2024 - Luke 15:25-32

### **Parable 3, open-ended conclusion: What did the “older brother” do?**

Jesus’ story ended once the younger son came home, and the party began—right? No—Jesus told the story to people who grumbled about him mixing with “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 15:2). So he added the older brother, sure he was the “good” son and not pleased at all to see his brother back home. At the story’s end, the father poignantly pleads with the older brother to join the party: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found” (verse 32).

- The servant in the story said, “Your brother has arrived.” When the father came out to him, the older son said, “This son of yours returned.” The father shifted the relationship back: “This brother of yours,” he said. In your imagination, argue the older brother’s case: why was it wrong to welcome

the younger one home? In what ways was that case, and the “good” brother’s reaction, out of harmony with the father’s wishes?

- As he did in a few other parables (e.g. Luke 13:6-9, Matthew 21:33-40), Jesus left this story “unfinished.” He didn’t say what the older brother did. How did this approach put the responsibility on the Pharisees to decide how they would respond? With whatever “older brother” tendencies you find in yourself, how will you finish Jesus’ parable?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to “enter in” to the joy of your kingdom, and celebrate what you are doing in other’s lives. Move me from a “tit for tat” existence to an exuberant, abundant life. Amen.

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## **SATURDAY, June 22, 2024 - Ezekiel 34:11-16, John 10:7-15**

### **“The good shepherd lays down his life”**

Ezekiel portrayed God as a good shepherd who would “seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak.” John’s gospel completed the story. God came to earth in the person of Jesus, and as promised reached out to the lost and the strays, bound up our wounds, and took special interest in the weak. He didn’t just talk about that—he actually did it (e.g. John 8:2-11). He was the Good Shepherd, and in the end, he did indeed give up his life for the sheep—us.

- Reflect on the three stories Jesus told—the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the woman sweeping and searching for the lost coin, and the father running to greet the lost son who had come home. In what ways can these stories deepen and enrich your inner sense of how much God loves you? Have you ever pictured that, every time you move closer to God, a party breaks out in heaven—that you are that important to God? How can trusting that God loves you in this profound, relentless way give you a solid foundation for living “life to the fullest,” as Jesus promised in John 10:10?

**Prayer:** God, your love seems almost (but not quite) too good to be true! Thank you for giving your life for me. I open my heart to you—transform my inner life, broaden my horizons, and shine out of me as I enter into your joy. Amen.

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**Family Activity:** Gather your family for a few rounds of hide-and-seek. Then read Luke 15:11-32. Ask, “What did you do while you were hiding in our game?” “What did the lost son do while he went away?” “How far away did you go during hide-and-seek?” “How about the lost son?” Say, “No matter how far away you were or what you chose to do while you were hiding, someone always came to find you. The prodigal son journeyed far from home and made some very poor choices while he was away. Yet his father [God] welcomed him home with great love and joy.

Though God wants us to stay close and follow him, when we stray, God will always welcome us back with love.” Pray and thank God for his faithful and enduring love.

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