

One truth shared: You are the reason the angels celebrate—but you are not the reason you are found: Jesus is.

Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:3-10

The Found Are Left; the Lost are Found

Did you catch that? *Angels* threw a party for you!

Contrary to pop culture, we were never once angels, we are not an angel now, and, when we die, we will not become angels, either. The Bible draws an incredibly clear distinction between humans and angels. And although these servants of God are very knowledgeable and incredibly powerful, angels are *not* the apple of God’s eye. They are not the crown of God’s creation: *you* are. So, it’s no surprise then that, behind the stories of shepherds and women celebrating with friends and neighbors, we find angels celebrating for every sinner who comes to faith in Jesus.

Jesus paints the picture of a shepherd leaving the 99 sheep ‘found’ in his flock in pursuit of one who was lost. And when he finds it, he tells all his friends and neighbors—because that one sheep is totally worth the celebration. In the second parable, Jesus portrays a woman with ten coins (each worth a day’s salary) and—when she loses just one of them, she turns her whole house upside down to find it. And when she finally does, she—like that shepherd—tells all her friends and neighbors that her lost coin was found. And yet, such rejoicing over lost coins and sheep pales in comparison to the celebration of the angels in heaven when even one sinner repents—when even one person turns away from sin and turns to Jesus in faith—including you.

“Well, why?” you might be wondering. “Why am I worth the party?” Maybe your heart is filled with regrets from all the mistakes you’ve made, and you wonder “How could God’s love possibly run that deep?” We, as breakers of God’s law, look at our total lack of worthiness to be called God’s child and wonder “How could God possibly love someone as broken and messed up as me?” But maybe your first thought wasn’t “Why would I be worth a party?” Maybe your first thought was “Why *wouldn’t* I be worth a party? I’m a good person! I’m nowhere as bad as some of the people I know—including other Christians! I try to read my Bible and go to church. I’m not out partying or wasting my life away. Why wouldn’t I be worth celebrating?”

Don’t get me wrong: you were worth celebrating; but if we double down and insist it’s by virtue of “who I am” or “what I’ve done” that we’re deserving or worthy of God’s love, we’re dead wrong. When you and I stare into the mirror of God’s law and try to see an entitled or meritorious ‘me’, we’re only going to find a wayward ‘me’ covered in pig slop and rags—stinky and stained with sin. We needed a new wardrobe.

But if you feel that you’re too sinful to be forgiven, too broken to be fixed, or simply too lost to be rescued, you’d be wrong about that, too. God’s love runs deep. This is where God’s grace—amazing, sweeping, saving grace—just blows our man-made economies clear out of the water.

You see, we were the lost sheep. We were the lost coin. The Bible tells us that we were born spiritually blind, deaf, and dumb—born enemies of God—estranged from God. And without God’s gracious, divine intervention, estranged is where our relationship would have stayed. But the seeking compassion of our God took action and found us. We must celebrate!

You are the reason the angels celebrate—but you are not the reason you are found. After all, that you are “found” means someone else had to find you. That means someone, in love, sought you and pursued you—in spite of you. Your God calls out to us through his Word when we drift away. Your Savior binds you up in his loving arms through his Holy Supper. Your God receives you with arms open wide in grace. There is no sin that stinks too much that he couldn’t possibly love you. There is no stain too deep that Jesus’ death on the cross hasn’t washed away with his holy, precious blood. When your heart is heavy with guilt, know you can always come to your God—knowing that grace is what he stands ready to give. He stands ready to hear and receive each and every one of your prayers—and he lovingly invites you to cast all your cares and anxieties onto him because he cares for you. You are forgiven. You are free. And all the angels in heaven celebrate.

Prayer: Lord, you, in your mercy, sought us to be your own. When we wander and go astray, call us back to you through your Word and comfort us by your redeeming love. Amen.

Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

Year C – Proper 19

Hard Truth

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The Found Are Left; the Lost are Found

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- How many milestone moments can you think of in our lives that (culturally speaking) require us to throw a party?
- We go to insane lengths to throw parties for people. We’ll spend a lot of time planning them and a lot of money throwing them. Why is that?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they’ve looked at it.*

- You probably haven’t lost any sheep recently. And the coins we find on the pavement aren’t really worth celebrating when they’re found.
- Have you ever lost your phone, your cat, your dog, or your wallet? How did you feel when they were lost? How did you feel when you found them?

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

- Jesus uses two parables here: one of a lost sheep, and the other a lost coin. Is he effectively saying the same thing twice? Or are there differences between a lost sheep and a lost coin? What do you think?
- If we double down and insist it’s by virtue of “who I am” or “what I’ve done” that we’re deserving or worthy of God’s love, why would we be dead wrong?

- If we feel that we're too sinful to be forgiven, too broken to be fixed, or simply too lost to be rescued, why would we be wrong about that, too?

Conclusion: Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.

- We were the lost sheep. We were the lost coin. And why couldn't we find ourselves? Put another way, why couldn't we find God on our own?
- You are the reason the angels celebrate—but you are not the reason you are found. After all, that you are "found" means someone else had to find you. Who has found us?