

## The one sheep

Read Luke 15:1-7

Message: Luke 15:7

I'm probably not alone when I say that I remember the first time I heard this story told, and I remember falling in love with the shepherd. This is my Jesus, my Saviour, my God. He is the shepherd who went out to search for the one sheep.

Here is the story.

A shepherd had 100 sheep. It's a big job to take care of so many sheep at once. A sheep dog would have helped, but it was still a stressful job. With a hundred sheep, it is easy to lose one and not notice. And in our story, that is exactly what happened. The shepherd lost a sheep as he was leading his flock from one pasture to another. When, as shepherds do, he stopped and counted his sheep, he discovered that there was one missing, so he left the 99 in the open country and backtracked, looking for the one he lost. He looked for clues where it might have wandered off and followed trails it might have taken until at last he saw the lost sheep.

The shepherd loves all the sheep, but when one gets lost, he longs for that one more than for all the rest. So when he finds it, he shows more love for that one than for all the rest. He carefully carries it on his neck resting on his shoulders - not because the sheep cannot walk but because he wants to show special love and attention to this one sheep. And when he gets home, he calls his friends together and says, "Rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep!"

So let's think about the parable. Who is the shepherd? That's obvious. It is Jesus.

And who is the lost sheep? That's quite obvious too: it is the person who has become separated from Jesus. The flock tried to walk and live in harmony with the Saviour but the one sheep did not want to. It walked a different path and got lost. And it's almost impossible for a sheep, separated from the flock, to survive on its own without the protection of the shepherd.

Jesus says that there is more joy in heaven over the one sheep that repents - so this lost sheep is a Christian who is living in a sinful pattern and needs to repent. That person realized he or she was being sinful, confessed it to God, asked for forgiveness and resolved to live a new life in obedience to God.

I know. For Jesus had sought me out. He convicted me of sin by his Spirit. He changed my heart so that I would hate those evil things my heart desired, and filled my heart instead with a longing to do what is good. He lifted me onto his shoulders and carried me because he wanted to indulge me with rich signals of his love until he carried me all the way back to the flock. And I don't think I could have walked that path on my own anyway. But you see, the lost sheep so not some exceptional case, something extreme. The lost sheep is me, but I have been brought back.

In a church where there are many people whom I have come to love and respect, it seems to me they are the righteous ones who have no need to repent. They are at home with the angels in heaven. But I know my struggles. I know what lures me away from the flock and from the shepherd, and I can lose heart, lose hope.

But Jesus says: Not so. I love you, especially you. I will make my love for you the cause for celebrations in heaven for I will rescue you and bring you home every time you wander.

Jesus does not want you, lost sheep, to wander from him or to lose hope. He comes for you in love to carry you home. It is just such stories of tenderness that has made Jesus loved by so many people down through the ages. People like me and like you who know that we often wander and that we need to be rescued again and again by the good shepherd.

But the church participates in the pastoral care of the Lord Jesus. You have a part to play in all this. Jesus invites you to love your wandering brother or sister. Reach out to that person. Search hard for them. Look for clues that show their wandering soul and seek until you find them, until you reach them, and bring them back to their senses so that they return to the Lord Jesus.

Do not lose heart over those who have turned away. Jesus would have you rise and pursue them and bring them back. It is why Jesus came to earth - to pursue you and to find you and to bring you into salvation and his church and in his flock. Surely, what he has done for you, he can do for others through you.