

**March 4, 2018**  
**Lent: We all, like sheep, have gone astray**  
**Isaiah 53:4-6**

*"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus," writes Luke (15:1). "But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them ...'"*

Let's stop there. How do you lose a sheep? Let's be accurate: it's not really the shepherd who loses the sheep. Realistically, it's the sheep that loses the shepherd and the flock.

Now, no sheep wakes up in the morning and thinks, *"Today, I'm going to get lost."* Sheep *"nibble their way to lostness. They move from one tuft of grass to the next. They keep moving, along from tuft to tuft, sometimes right through a hole in the fence. When they're done nibbling they can't find the hole and they're lost"* (Bruce Larson).

What might it mean for a person to "nibble their way to lostness"? Jesus is spending time with *"tax collectors and sinners."* I suspect that none of them set off in life wanting to be "a tax collector and a sinner." It just kind of happened. They nibbled their way to lostness. Have you ever done that? How does it feel?

In our text today, Isaiah says to the people of Israel, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way"* (Isaiah 53:6). The Israelites – all the Israelites including Isaiah – had nibbled their way to lostness. If you read Isaiah and the other prophets, you read how the people of Israel had lost their love for God, went through the motions of religion but had no passionate belief, refused to trust in God's power, ignored injustice, allowed the poor and widows to be taken advantage of, didn't care for refugees in their midst, permitted dishonest business practices, tolerated lying and cheating ... They didn't wake up and say, *"We're going to be bad people."* It just kinda happened.

What does the shepherd do? Jesus, in His parable, continues: *"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?"*

The shepherd goes after the lost sheep. This lost sheep isn't anything special; it hadn't won "Best in Show." And yet it is special, just as all the others are special. The owner is willing to go after any and every lost sheep. In our age of largescale farming, we might just accept losing one sheep now and then as the cost of doing business (only a 1% loss). But in the First Century, shepherds had a very personal relationship with their animals.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a Good Shepherd to describe His relationship with us. Notice how much the shepherd cares for each on his sheep:

*"The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The watchman opens the*

*gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice"*(John 10:2-4).

The shepherd knows each and every sheep by name. And they, in turn, know the shepherd.

*"I am the good shepherd,"* Jesus continues. *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away ... The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep"*(John 10:11-15).

### ***What does this mean for us?***

Remember the last phrase – *"I lay down my life for the sheep."* It may not be easy to rescue a lost sheep. The shepherd may risk his own life to do so. The sheep by its nibbling, the tax collectors and sinners by their sinfulness, us by our wandering, cost the Good Shepherd His life. As we move through Lent toward Good Friday (when we remember the crucifixion), we are reminded that we, all like sheep, have gone astray: *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **and** all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"*(Romans 3:23-24).

What does this tell us about Jesus? What does this tell us about our relationship with Jesus?

Imagine the impact of this story on the people who were assembled – tax collectors and "sinners"? What does this mean to you?

Isaiah 53:4-5 writes about God's faithful Servant, the Messiah:

*"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."*

Take some time to reflect on the awesome, costly, unconditional, excruciating love of God.

*"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,"* Isaiah concludes (53:6). The Father is willing to give His own life, through Jesus, to bring us lost sheep back into the fold.

Dr. David Yonggi Cho describes how, during the Korean War, he lived in a village where everyone was desperately poor. There were no jobs. He writes how young boys, like himself, would climb into coal cars on the railway. They would steal enough coal to sell to buy food and clothes to make it through the harsh winter.

*"One day a group of refugees climbed up on a cargo train to steal coal. Then an American*

*military policeman came running toward them, shouting for them to get down. Frightened, they jumped out of the cargo train. One small seven-year-old boy was among the group fleeing. He started to run with the rest of the group when he saw some coal that had fallen under the train. He crawled under the train to retrieve that coal. Just as he was about to reach the coal, the train began to move. The people standing nearby shrieked, but no one dared to save that boy and endanger their own lives.*

*"Then one middle-aged man ran near the train. With a burst of his full strength he pushed the boy to safety, clear of the railroad tracks. But the man was no longer safe. In the next moment we heard the cracking of this man's bones as the train's steel wheels tore his body apart. That man had given his life for the young boy. That man was the young boy's father."<sup>1</sup>*

What does the Father's love, Jesus' love, mean to you? COMMUNION

### ***What next?***

Jesus concludes his parable of the lost sheep like this. *"When he finds the lost sheep, 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.'"* Jesus goes on to say there is much rejoicing in heaven when He brings one of His lost sheep home (Luke 15:5-7).

When one of those tax collectors or sinners who had nibbled their way to lostness is found by Jesus, there is a party. One of the regular metaphors for people coming to faith in Jesus is a celebration or a feast (Jesus tells another story right after this, the story of prodigal son(s), which ends with one lost son coming home to the Father. The Father's response: *"Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found"* (Luke 15:22-24).

How can we be more excited about the Kingdom of God? How can we celebrate better?

Jesus, explaining how He is the Good Shepherd, says, *"I am the gate for the sheep ... whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:7-10).

1. ***There is a gate!*** There is a Good Shepherd who will not abandon us, leave us lost, or sit back wistfully hoping we will find our way home. The Good Shepherd comes looking for us. He wants each of us to come home.
2. ***Only Jesus is the gate.*** There is an exclusiveness to Jesus message. He – and only He – is the gate for the sheep. He – and only He – is The Good Shepherd. He – and only He – can save us. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,"* says Jesus (John 14:6).
3. ***We must allow Him to pick us up and bring us home.*** A sheep can keep running

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in N. Gumbel, *The Heart of Revival* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1997), p. 75.

away and running away and running away. So can we ...

4. ***This is GOOD!*** Allowing Jesus to pick us up, and bring us home is a ***GOOD*** thing. His will is only the best for us. His goal is that we may have life, and have it to the fullest.

***What does it mean to have life, and have it to the full?***

***We know the Shepherd and He knows us.*** Those of us who know Jesus, know the presence of His Spirit in us, and know the love of the Father, know how wonderful it is that He is always with us:

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake."* (Psalm 23:1-3)

***We do not face the challenges of life alone:***

*"Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* (Psalm 23:4)

***We have purpose and meaning.*** Back in the beginning, people were created "in the image of God" to "tend and care for" God's creation (Genesis 2:15). "In the image of God," we are to be good stewards, good shepherds of all of God's creation. A big part of rediscovering life to the full, is rediscovering our God-given opportunities

- to care for others, in the name of Jesus,
- to be wise stewards, in the name of Jesus,
- to act justly and to love mercy, in the name of Jesus,
- to walk humbly with God, in the name of Jesus,
- to help people find hope in life, now and hereafter, in the name of Jesus,
- to help other people meet the Good Shepherd – Jesus!
- To worship Jesus – to be still and know that He is God.

*"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* (Psalm 23:5-6)

That is the Good News!