

## **Beware of First Impressions (Luke 15:1-10)**

### **Sermon, Bob Stelter**

Have I ever told you about the time I won a free Chevy Blazer? It is a long, complicated story....

Beware of first impressions. That is a good old proverb. I think everyone of us could tell a story of how wrong we were about someone or something based upon first impressions.

Talk to a couple that has been married for fifty years or more. They will tell you there are still many things they do not fully understand about their spouse. People can be difficult to understand.

We come here to experience and learn about God in our worship services. A word of caution: We are always subject to the danger of thinking we know all there is to know about God. It can get so routine, especially once we have God figured out. Beware of first impressions.

In today's Gospel readings, we have two of the lost stories of Jesus. Not that they were lost and rediscovered, no, they are stories about some things that get lost. Beware of first impressions with the stories of Jesus. There is always more than meets the eye.

Lost are one sheep out of 99. Lost is one little coin out of ten.

Big deal. 1% of the sheep lost. Surely a good shepherd cannot afford to leave the 99 to look for the 1. That would be too risky. Losing a sheep along the way is counted as part of the price of doing business, of overseeing the flock.

There will be some lost sheep through the year. It is a rough and dangerous world out there in the wild, so you lose one? So what?

And losing one coin? Big deal, we drop coins all the time. Between the couch cushions, down the seats of the car.

But what happens in these lost stories? They become found stories. The shepherd risks the 99 sheep to find that lost one. And when that sheep is finally found, the shepherd puts that wayward one on his shoulders and gathers his friends and says, “Rejoice, I found the one who was lost. Let’s have a party.” Because that’s what you do when you find something you’ve been searching for. You throw a party. We learned that from the dad of the prodigal son.

There is a real difficult effort in finding the lost sheep. And there is real joy once the lost sheep is found.

Same with the coin. It is one simple little meaningless coin. Yet, the one

who lost the coin tears the house upside down looking for it. And when she finds it, again, there is joy.

Not what you'd expect. So, I lost a coin. It'll show up sooner or later. Beware of first impressions. She calls her neighbors and friends and says, "Rejoice, let's have a party. Let's celebrate. I have found that which was lost."

Jesus concludes these stories with this statement: "In the same way, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Lost and found. Jesus loves that game. He's very good at it. Jesus is a seeker, a finder, a rejoicer.

The good news is that if you feel lost, however, whenever you feel lost, please know that Jesus will find you. If you haven't been found yet, you will be. Jesus searches for you, seeks you, longs to find you. And when he does, you know there will be a party just because you were found.

Beware of first impressions. Don't give up, no matter how lost you think you are. You will be found. And there will be a party.

A lost sheep is, for all practical purposes, a dead sheep. A lost coin, likewise, is a dead asset. These are not

stories about the need to repent. A sheep and a coin cannot repent.

No, these are stories about being found, about death and life. Lostness and death are the only tickets to God. God alone gives life and God gives if freely and fully with no conditions whatsoever.

Beware of first impressions. In these lost stories, there is not one single note of earning or merit, not one breath about rewarding the rewardable, correcting the correctible or improving the improvable.

There is only the gracious saving determination of the shepherd and the woman. If you haven't figured it out by now, the shepherd and the woman are surrogates for God. They find, they bring the lost back to life, they raise the dead.

We are lost. We are dead in our sins. We have no power by ourselves to either save ourselves or to convince anyone else that we are worth saving. Our whole life is finally and forever out of our hands and that if we ever hope to live again, our life will entirely be the gift of someone greater than us who finds us.

Beware of first impressions. Hear me now: Jesus finds us in the lostness of death, not in the garden of improvement. Without him, we are

lost. In the power of Jesus' resurrection, he puts us on his shoulders rejoicing and brings us home.

If you see me leaving the church today, I'm driving my daughter's 2007 little beat up Toyota Yaris with 214,000 miles. I'm still waiting on my new Chevy Blazer.

Amen.