



Sunday, September 14, 2025  
Luke 15:1-10 (Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

We can lose a lot of things. Our mind, our memory, or our marbles. Our confidence, self-esteem, or our mojo. We might lose our way or our place. We may lose face, our reputation, or self-respect. Or perhaps it's our wallet, keys, phone, or glasses.

We can lose trust, respect, or patience. We can lose sleep, time, or an opportunity. Maybe it's an argument, a game, or a war. And if we lose our wealth or our health, then we might also lose hope. We can be lost in a moment, lost without the one we love, and we might even lose our faith.

A friend of mine recently said, *"I feel like I've lost parts of myself, and I don't know if I'll ever be able to find them again."* I knew exactly what he was talking about. And this got me thinking about the parts of my own life that I feel have been lost along the way, recent losses and those never forgotten ones from long ago.

I'm guessing that you know what that's like too and I'm certain you can name the parts of yourself that have been lost along the way. Some of those lost parts are a result of recent wounds, while others are a result of painful memories of what was. And yet, the questions remain – *Can I ever find the lost parts of myself? Can I ever become whole again?*

I wonder if that's what the shepherd and the woman in today's gospel are asking themselves. I wonder if they feel as if they've lost a part of their life – a sheep, a coin. But it's not just *any sheep*, but *this* sheep. And it's not just *any coin*, but *this* coin. It's not just *any part*, but *this* part. And without it we feel less than whole.

If you know what it's like to have lost a part of yourself then you know what it's like to be the shepherd and the woman in today's gospel. The woman says, *"I have found the coin that I had lost."* The shepherd says, *"I have found my sheep that was lost."* But it's more about the shepherd and woman than it is the sheep and coin.

The lost sheep and coin already belonged to the shepherd and woman. The shepherd had one hundred sheep to begin with, and the woman had ten coins to begin with. The shepherd lost a part of himself. The woman lost a part of herself. They were whole and complete until something in their life was lost.

What if *we* are the shepherd and the woman? And what if the sheep and coins are parts of our life – parts of ourselves? And maybe today's gospel isn't so much about categorizing ourselves or others as sinners or righteous as the Pharisees and scribes are doing, as it is about wholeness and losing parts of us – not who's good or bad, in or out.

And here's why I say this. Luke says that Jesus "told them this parable." Told who? Who is "them?" Is Jesus telling these parables to the tax collectors and sinners who were coming near to listen to him, or is he telling them to the Pharisees and scribes who were grumbling about him welcoming sinners and eating with them?

Yes. It is for them, all of them. And it is for us. *All* of us. The difference between the tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes isn't that one group is lost and the other isn't, or that one group is sinful and the other righteous.

The difference is that one group is lost, and they know it, and the other group is lost but they have no idea they're lost. Being lost is something all of us have experienced at some point. Sometimes we know it and other times we don't.

When have you lost a part of yourself? What parts of your life are you searching for today? What do you need to feel whole again? Have you ever said that you need to get your life turned around? Have you ever felt like something was missing? Maybe you knew what it was or maybe you didn't. Perhaps you just had a feeling that there was something missing, something more to your life.



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Maybe you knew something was missing in your marriage, your parenting, your reputation, your integrity, or your work and you wanted to turn things around. When have you walked away from a relationship or a part of your life because it was too hard or too scary? Have you ever looked in the mirror and wondered where the joy, excitement, or energy of your life went?

Sometimes we lose parts of ourselves to grief and sorrow, when life becomes overwhelming and confusing, to the pain and wounds of life, when we lose someone we love, to circumstances that are nobody's fault, and sometimes to the choices we've made. Sometimes we lose ourselves to fear, anger, jealousy, wanting to *be* right more than *doing* right, judgments we make of others, or refusing to forgive. Sometimes we lose ourselves to success, gaining approval, or meeting the expectations of others. Sometimes the lost part of ourselves is our faith, hope, or a dream. It's so easy to lose a piece of ourselves and it can happen in a thousand different ways.

Are you settling today for less than what you really want out of life and your relationships? Are you living less than a whole and complete life? The poet Mary Oliver asks it like this. "Are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?"

Let's not do that. Let's not settle. Today's gospel is an invitation to wholeness. It's not about being 90% or even 99% alive or whole. But to do this we have to look at our entire life. Every sheep matters. Every coin matters.

And here's the Good News for all of us. The gospel of Jesus isn't about making bad people good. It's about bringing people back to life. It's about calling us to a path on which we find ourselves. Jesus is always calling us back to ourselves, back to wholeness.

We know today's gospel stories as the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. But I don't think that's entirely accurate. They could also be called the Parable of the Found Sheep and the Found Coin, because that's how both stories end. The shepherd is once again whole. The woman is once again whole. And there's rejoicing. They're not just stories of losing but also of finding. It's both.

Sometimes it's a call to light a lamp, sweep our house, and search carefully in the very place in which we live and have our relationships, the place that's most known and familiar. And other times the call to wholeness takes us into the wilderness, into the wild and untamed parts of our life.

That kind of searching, searching until we find, is not a searching outside of ourselves but a searching within. It means searching until we value ourselves beyond what we have done and left undone, beyond what we have or don't have, beyond our successes and failures, beyond what is or might have been.

I don't know how or when that finding will happen for you, but I know it does. I've experienced it in my own life, and I've seen it happen in the lives of others. That finding returns us to ourselves. And yet, I also know that the searching and finding never ends. And in this relentless finding we find out who God really is.

Because even when we can't seek or won't seek, God is always and forever seeking us. God looks for us when our lives are smoothly and when they're so chaotic and overwhelmed that we can't even pretend to look for God. But even in that seemingly hopeless place...God find us. And in that we have all the wholeness we need. Thanks be to God! Amen.