

Proper 19C
Luke 15:1-10
September 14, 2025

“We are the 99...and the 1”
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

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Do any of you have a problem with losing things? Is it ‘things’ in general, or one specific thing that you tend to lose, I wonder. Me, I have a problem with losing one particular thing. I’m afraid you’ll think less of me when I tell you what it is. But I think vulnerability is important, so today I’ll lead by example. I have a problem losing Loki. Loki is the 11-pound Shih-Tzu that rules my life when I’m not here. His body is the size of a football, but his ego rivals the height of the Sears Tower—or whatever it’s called now. Because he’s so small, Loki can squeeze through fences and gates. He often

discovers the groundhogs' tunnels before I do, and before long he's gone—curiosity, not mischief.

A couple of years ago when he did his disappearing act, I couldn't find him – not in the neighbor's yard or on the campus of Our Savior Lutheran, two of his usual first stops. In a panic, I texted my neighbors. No one had seen him. Then I texted the former minister at Our Savior. As I was racing to my car to begin the search in earnest, she texted back that Loki was on a leash, with a lady, in front of the church. Apparently, he'd made it all the way to downtown before a walker, suspiciously carrying a dog leash but no dog, clipped him in and started back home. Recognizing the egotistical escape artist as they passed by the church window, she went outside and engaged them until I arrived.

While the sinner in Jesus' story may have repented, Loki still never has. I've been told I deserve it for naming him after the Norse god of mischief. I swear, the name chose him! As much as I love Loki, I never stop searching until I find him. That same urgency is what Jesus lifts up in today's parables.

In our text from Luke's gospel, the author begins by telling us that while tax collectors and sinners were coming and eating with Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees were grumbling about his choice of company. The Pharisees were respected religious leaders, and often set up in the Gospels as foils to Jesus. In response, he told stories.

First, he told of a shepherd with a modestly large flock of 100 sheep. One of the sheep had wandered off, so the shepherd left the 99, and celebrated when he returned with the lost one. Second, he told of a woman with 10 silver coins, the equivalent of ten days' wages. She lost one of the coins, searched for it, and celebrated when she found it. The moral of the stories? Jesus cares about lost things.

The sinners and tax collectors Luke began with apparently qualified as "lost." Tax collectors were seen as traitors, and 'sinners' was a catch-all term for anyone considered outside the faithful. Yet Jesus reminded his

hearers: these too had value. This is a message that I believe resonates across the expanse of time and confronts us today, in 21st century America.

Please know that the next words I will speak are directed as much at myself as to anyone else. In our country, we like to call ourselves “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” That should mean that honest exchange is never something to fear, that the sharing of opinions is welcomed, and that healthy debate leads to growth. That’s how it ought to be—because every voice really does matter, and so does every person behind it.

Too often, though, that’s not how things go. We find ourselves divided, dismissing people we disagree with, and sometimes even letting disagreements turn into anger or worse, violence. It’s easy to get swept up in that. I know sometimes I do.

And yet, there’s another way – a better way. We’ve all seen neighbors helping one another when disaster strikes. We’ve seen strangers standing up for someone they’ve never met. We’ve seen communities, like this church, where listening is more important than winning. These glimpses remind us that the stories Jesus told are not out of reach.

In truth, we are all a mix of scribe and sinner, sometimes the 99 who feel safe, and sometimes the 1 who has wandered. We are coins carefully kept, and coins kicked under the cupboard. None of us are always right, always strong, or always “found.” But the teaching of Jesus is clear: every sheep matters.

I wish I could tell you that was the last time I lost Loki. But it wasn’t and it probably won’t be. But when he slips out, I don’t stop until he’s back—because he matters to me. Jesus’ stories say the same: every sheep matters, every coin matters, every person matters. And if we lived like that—treating even those we disagree with as worth searching for—we’d build a community that feels whole, not divided. That’s the work in front of us. May we have courage for the search, and joy in the finding. Amen.