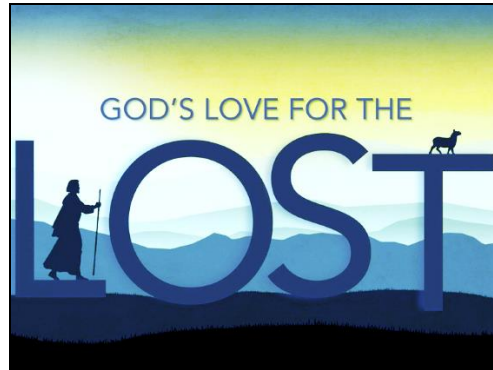


## LOST AND FOUND!



### *Scripture:*

### **Psalm 51:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup>Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup>You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. <sup>7</sup>Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

### **Luke 15:1-10**

<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him (Jesus). <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“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? <sup>5</sup>When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>“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? <sup>9</sup>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.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### **This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



Jesus teaches many lessons in this narrative for today. I'll narrow it down.

First, he demonstrated that God considers all of us as equally worthy of his attention by socializing with tax-collectors and other sinners who wanted to listen to him. At the same time, the Pharisees and the

scribes were showing their sinful selves by grumbling about how inclusive Jesus was being.

Second, Jesus teaches that even those we consider “lost” are worthy to be found. There is inherent value in each person among the multitudes. No one is worthless or hopeless. (Flashback!)

Remember the message in Paul's letter to Philemon last week? It was about a similar theme involving Onesimus, whose name means useless. Paul told Philemon he wasn't useless, but he was useful and had become a brother and his equal rather than a slave.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN**

This parable of the lost sheep and lost coin was told in the face of those who not only looked down upon shepherds and women as lower status in that society, but they also would not for a moment consider befriending anyone they considered sinful. Yet they were the ones in need of repentance and forgiveness! By being exclusive, they were the sinful ones.

This story inspires us to also ponder: Where are we ourselves "lost" and need finding? Why are so many in our present society feeling so lost and hopeless that two hundred fifty-five of them (so far this year) have committed mass shootings. A mass shooting is defined as four or more people shot (dead or injured) not including the shooter. CBS news reported that by September 1<sup>st</sup>, there have been nearly nine thousand deaths as a result of mass shootings in 2019. That is more than three times the number of U.S. soldiers killed in the war in Afghanistan. We are suffering from a domestic war, and we have three more months of this year left! War has come to the United States.

### **SPREADING THE GOSPEL**

We are born to bless others. We were born to welcome all. We were born to be Jesus to those in need. We were born not for ourselves, but for God's purposes, to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven. God set the world in motion in a way that promotes life to flourish. Jesus came so we could have life and have it abundantly by imitating his role-modeling of God's love in the flesh.

By helping the lost understand they are loved, forgiven, and blessed by God, you are spreading the Gospel, that Good News, that Jesus came to love and forgive them. You can help them understand the amazing grace Jesus offers that inspires even slave ship captains to write the words: "I once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see."

Simply put, each of us is born with the same purpose: To love God and to love our neighbors.

Loving our neighbors includes making sure the planet is a healthy place to live for ourselves and for all our neighbors. Loving our neighbors includes the neighbors whose homes were destroyed in a hurricane. We all are called to help them find a way to have an abundant life again. They are our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

**Psychological studies have found that every effort to help the lost have hope in life again ends up helping the giver have life, too. That is the rhythm and reciprocity of giving.**

### **LOSS**

Jesus often preached about the "lost." But loss, in itself, is hard, no matter what kind of loss it is. Just thinking about people or things we have lost can bring up a lot of emotions, especially after the fires. We think about all the people lost in the fires, all the animals, all the property.

Jobs lost, businesses lost, self-esteem lost, physical well-being lost. Those who have been through the fires know loss in a much deeper way than ever before. Now in Santa Rosa and in Paradise we find ourselves measuring time by "Before the Fires" and "After the Fires."

I am becoming more and more aware that this season in my life is a season of loss. So, I'd better learn to cope. But how do we help other people through losses? What is our job as Christians to help fill that emptiness left after a tragedy? Well it depends on what skills or talents you are blessed with and then go from there. Everyone has some talent or gift to share. You can talk on the phone, write a letter, make food.

### **SEPTEMBER 11**

A member of my Doctor of Ministry cohort had some special skills to help with thousands of losses in a tragic event that we remembered on Sept. 11th. He was a second career pastor like me and had a certification in forensic evidence collection.

Robert's first job, though, seemed much more exciting than mine as a Psychiatric Nurse Therapist. Robert was in a long-time career in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The ATF is a law enforcement agency in the United States Department of Justice that protects our communities from violent criminals, criminal organizations, the illegal use and trafficking of firearms, the illegal use and storage of explosives, acts of arson and bombings, acts of terrorism, and the illegal diversion of alcohol and tobacco products.

<https://www.atf.gov>

*There is even a place on this site where you can anonymously report a tip of a crime that is about to happen like a plan for a bombing somewhere.)* Timothy McVeigh's friends could have reported him anonymously.

Robert was still moonlighting for the ATF after becoming the pastor of a church in the mid-west and then entering our program in Pittsburgh. He would periodically have to take a leave of absence for a few weeks if they called him for an undercover job. One was as a Ku Klux Klan informant, very much like the undercover people in the movie, *The Black Klansman*. Sometimes he would be called up to infiltrate the Hells Angels. And Robert was a perfect person for these roles because he had no fear and high intelligence. He could pretend he was a White Supremacist.

But the biggest job Robert had done in the past was to be in charge of all the evidence collection at Ground Zero in New York City. He planned and strategized how to collect all the forensic evidence collection after the planes were used as huge bombs to bring down the towers.

In that role, he managed how the remains of the towers were sifted. His extensive team would dig through the ashes and find whatever seemed helpful in putting the pieces back together to tell the story of 9/11. So of course, much of his work involved finding pieces of people's belongings.

When they found evidence from a person's remains, his team would trace the item found and contact their families to give them the wallet, the necklace, the shoe, whatever was somehow preserved in the heap of ashes.

It was a very emotional job. But Robert served very well. Even when the items found confirmed their loved ones were dead, the families were so thankful for a way to remember their loved ones. Here are two of the items Robert's team found that are now in an exhibit at the 9/11 memorial.



The fire helmet belonged to Captain Patrick John Brown whose life was lost rescuing people from the towers.



This wedding ring was worn by Robert Joseph Gschaar, age 55, who was on the 92nd floor working for the AON Corporation when a plane flew into the tower floors below him.

The names of those "lost" are now on the wall at the 9/11 Ground Zero Memorial. If you haven't been to see it, I encourage you to go. It is a beautiful memorial and an important time in our history to remember. If you can't go, you can see it thanks to Google.

<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.7123473,-74.0134411,2a,90y,145.72h,98.25t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1saCFxtnF4hsn8xZX1YKPRVQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

### HOW TO HEAL

God's love can work miracles. God's love was palpable in the response to 9/11, too. In 2003, I presented at a conference at the United Nations about helping children heal from trauma. Just two years after 9/11, a group of high school students who had each lost a family member in the twin towers, performed a dramatic presentation about loss and recovery.

The drama they created was about how to heal from the emotional wounds resulting from deep loss. They were walking symbols of resilience and hope. They were also aware that by trying to help others deal with tragedy and loss they were also receiving healing, too.

**Over time, I believe tragedy can be utilized as a source of strength if you instill hope in the recovery.**

**The Dalai Lama said,  
"No matter what sort of difficulties  
or how painful the experience is,  
if we lose our hope,  
that's the real disaster."**

Those who have lost hope are like the lost sheep in our country. There is a problem in our society creating a sense of hopelessness. We all need to do some soul searching to find what we can do to intercept these young male mass shooters before they feel so hopeless and take the lives of innocents. All of us can make a difference by showing love and care especially for those who have lost their way in life.

### **THE PRISON FELLOWSHIP**

The Prison Fellowship is an organization that has proven successful in giving hope to the hopeless and in helping the families of people incarcerated. They operate with the theology that Christians are called to "carry each other's burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ."

They believe we should pursue fellowship with the members of the Body of Christ who live behind prison bars, offering encouragement and support.

The mission of Prison Fellowship is to inspire churches to celebrate redemption in our congregations and communities by welcoming back those who have paid their debt to society, and by providing opportunities for all persons to reach their God-given potential.

As Christians, we have each received a second chance by the grace of God. We can extend the same spirit of acceptance to those who have paid their debt to society, enabling them to contribute positively to their families and our communities. Think of the incarcerated person as the lost sheep and we can bring them back into the flock with some encouraging work with their families.

I would love to see our church give hope to the hopeless and find the lost among the families of those incarcerated. National Presbyterian Church, which inspired me to go into ministry, has always been very involved in the Prison Fellowship. Of all the children on the planet who have a potential for becoming dysfunctional, those who are separated from their parents for one reason or another are very likely to be depressed. Let's reach out to this group of disenfranchised kids and their parents and see what we can do to bring light and hope to their lives. (The following video was shown to the congregation.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Me6oi-CrjJ8>

Like those who found their lost sheep or lost coin, we will rejoice when we seek and find the lost who need connection and community through the power of the love of God.

### **Benediction:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore.  
Amen**



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