



THEN drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. ³ And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴ *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?* (Luke 15:1-4)

EITHER *what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?* (Luke 15:8)

AND he said, *A certain man had two sons:* ¹² *And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.* ¹³ *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.* ¹⁴ *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.* (Luke 15:11-14)

The Gospel Text for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity next is the Parable of the Prodigal Son; but I believe that Parable takes on greater meaning when the previous two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin are taken into context with the Prodigal Son. All three parables address something that is lost in varying degrees of measure. Each has, I believe, a significant relevance to the nature of being either lost 'in' Christ, or lost 'to' Christ.

To set the stage for our devotion, let us recall the Words of our Lord's prayer in the Garden at Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal.

AND *now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.* ¹² *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be*

fulfilled. ¹³ *And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.* ¹⁴ *I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* ¹⁵ *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.* ¹⁶ *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

NB: Those our Lord proclaims to be not lost includes Peter who denied the Lord three times this very night. Peter was secure in the predestined calling of God even though he stumbled that one night three times over.

There are few routine occurrences more unsettling than to lose something even if of little worth, but to lose a very valuable possession is heartbreaking. One will search high and low, over and over again, until that thing is either recovered, or all hope of finding it is abandoned. A mother of ten children could never choose one of the ten to be eternally lost. They are all of equal value. In fact one is worth the ten in a mother's eyes.

The three parables under consideration today speak of someone, or something, that is lost. But each lost thing represents a certain stage of one's standing in Christ.

The first parable is of one sheep out of one hundred that is lost (1% lost). The second speaks of one coin out of ten that is lost; and the third speaks of one son out of two that is lost. What do these lost things refer to individually. Let's examine them one by one.

The Lost Sheep

What is the nature of a little sheep? It has very little situation awareness. It feels safe under the watchful eye of the shepherd. But it lacks distant vision. It can see clearly only a few feet ahead. I believe this lost sheep represents the baby Christian whose faith is not deeply rooted in the Word. He or she has only recently come to know the Lord, so their understanding of the wiles of the devil are not fully developed. They follow along behind the animal just to their front, but are tempted by a bit of grass just a little distance from the trail. Thus, they wander there to eat, but see more grass even further beyond. Suddenly, they look up and neither the other sheep nor the shepherd is anywhere in sight. At first, they panic and run to and from to find the shepherd and the flock, but to no avail. They wander aimlessly in fear of wolves and other predators. They are on their own without any defense in the absence of the Shepherd just as we Christians are lost without our Lord when we drift away from our sensibilities of Him.

So, what does the little sheep do? It begins to bleat among the rocks and crevices of the mountain slopes. The shepherd in due time misses the little fellow and secures his ninety and nine in a secure fold while he searches for the little one. At length, the shepherd hears the bleating (praying) sheep and carries it home on his shoulders to his friends "*saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*" Our Lord rejoices when an errant son or daughter of His elect wanders from faith but is finally awakened by the desperation of their circumstance. A newborn Christian has faith from the beginning but lacks the depth of spiritual knowledge and training which often results in their wandering into the wilderness of the world. Once aware of their lostness, they begin to pray (bleat) and seek the face of their Shepherd who knows their predicament and will bring them home to the fold.

The Lost Coin

What of the woman with ten silver coins one of which she loses (10% lost). A coin is not like an animal or a person. It is inanimate or dead just as the lost without Christ are dead in trespasses and sins. In fact, until we heard the Voice of Christ calling, we were all as the coin – dead to all around us. The coin is like the lost sinner who is dead in trespasses and sins. When a woman of Israel was wedded to her husband, she was given a diary by

her father in case she was ever summarily divorced by her husband – a practice not uncommon in Israel. The diary was her emergency fund on which to live in event of such a contingency. So, the woman was desperate to find the silver coin. God has His diary for the Bride of His Son (the Church) and every one that is chosen to make up that diary is important in the eyes of the Lord. He will never fail to find and make alive that lost coin of His heritage. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (Ephesians 2:4-5) “those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost,”*

The Lost Son

There were two sons, and the younger demanded his inheritance, early, even before the death of his father which was customary. The father was a kind and insightful man who granted this demand of a rebellious son. Not many days after, the boy packed his goods and set out on a world of adventure (50% lost). The old father watched sadly as the boy disappeared over the road leading to a far country. But the father was not blind to the boy's excesses in that far country. He was careful to hear reports of how the boy was getting on. He realized that forcing the boy's return would not be wise. Well, the boy wasted his money on fine living and drink. As long as the wealth held out, he was blessed with many ingratiating friends; but, once he was without money, he turned to see his friends, and none were there. He was hungry and homeless. He associated himself with a stranger (the devil) who cared nothing for the boy except in how he could use him. So, the stranger sent him into the pigs' sties to feed and care for them. This was particularly demeaning to a young Hebrew. Once, when he came to his right mind (for none of those who wander from their father are sane) he repented and resolved to go to his father and to repent.

The old father sat on that same porch watching the same horizon upon which the boy had disappeared long ago. Though the boy was ragged, stooped, and covered with the filth of pigs, the father nonetheless recognized the boy at first glance, ran to him, embraced him, had shoes put on his feet (freedom), a signet ring placed on his finger (authority), and a robe on his back to cover his filth (the redeeming blood of Christ). The boy was still his son and had ever been even in a far country; but now the son was home, and all was joy.

The older son was angry at the treatment his young brother received. He resented the reception given his lost brother and thought himself far better than the Prodigal. This older brother represented the scribes and Pharisees whose badgering had resulted in Christ giving the three parables: *“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them”* (Luke 15:1-3)

We, and they, have enough to be concerned about with our own souls instead of condemning those we consider of lower class or stature. That is the lesson simplified.