



This story is not about Winn-Dixie, but it did happen there!

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? 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:3-7)

Jesus Christ had the profound and divine talent of reducing the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven to the everyday experiences and observations of daily life. His Word is reflected in our lives each day as we witness seemingly mundane and casual events around us; but some stand out in sharper contrast than others. Let me tell you a Winn-Dixie story that I observed while shopping there yesterday.

On the way home from my church office, my wife asked me to stop by Winn-Dixie for several items from milk to Brillo pads. As I was searching for the items on my list (they never seem to be logically arrayed), I saw a Hispanic couple with their two precious little daughters shopping. One daughter was perhaps six years old and the other between two and three years of age. They were dressed beautifully, but their apparel did not match the personal beauty of two innocent young girls. Their grooming reflected their mother's love for them.

Everywhere the mother and father went, the six year old was right beside helping to reach items from the shelf and being as helpful as possible. The other, the youngest, was all over the store running here and there as if this were her personal playground.

As I continued shopping, I heard an announcement over the public address system that, at first, was only mildly unsettling: "If anyone has seen a young baby girl alone in the store, please contact the front cashier." I then saw many people, including myself, hurriedly going from aisle to aisle looking for that precious little treasure; but it was the mother and father that were most frantic in the search. The search continued for at least 15-20 minutes. My mild concern had turned into a gnawing fear. I was in the back of the market at the time checking the break-room when I suddenly heard a shriek from the front of the store, followed by wailing and weeping. I expected the very worst.

After running to the front of the store, I was relieved to see the poor mother holding the baby girl tightly in her arms and weeping uncontrollably. No attention at all was being paid to the older daughter - all attention, love, and joyful tears were being shed for that younger little lamb that had been lost, but now was found. It must be stated, too, that this did not mean that the older daughter suffered any deficiency of her parents' love - it was simply a matter of priorities of loving that which seemed tragically lost only a few moments earlier.

Heaven is just like that mother's heart. When one of hers has gone astray in strange places, Heaven seek and searches until that child of God is found and restored. Then there will be tears of rejoicing by the angels in Heaven. "And if so be that he find it,

verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (Matt 18:13-14) We have a weakness in our faith, but there is a wideness in the mercy of God. We are forgetful and may wander away from our great Father in Heaven, but He will seek and search us out until He finds us and restores us - just like that little Mexican princess. *"I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."* (Luke 15:7)

When I witness such a scene as I saw at Winn-Dixie yesterday, my heart is warmed to remember that the love of God is far greater than tongue or pen can tell. The story may seem too plain and simple for your appreciation¹, and it is true that we all respond to different modes of inspiration, but I hope your heart will be touched by love as was mine in knowing of this little common story.

¹ Somehow I doubt that. This is a superb illustration of the timelessness of the Scriptural message.