

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**September 14, 2025**  
**1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10**

**"A Lost Sermon**

This may sound like an odd question, but does anybody have my sermon? It was here earlier when I rehearsed it. Maybe I laid it down in one of the pews or took it with me when I went to my office? It's five sheets with lots of yellow highlight on it. Would each of you check around you to see if it's there? Steve Heald, would you check on my desk? I mean, it may not be the world's greatest sermon, but I did spend quite a few hours writing it. If we don't have a sermon, we will get out of worship early, but it would feel sort of incomplete, wouldn't it?

Thank goodness, you found it! I am so relieved! This would have been my most embarrassing moment ever, if we hadn't found it. You know, Jesus told some parables about things that were lost - a sheep, a coin, a couple of sons, and the celebration that takes place when the lost is found. It does make us happy to find something that was lost.

It's amazing to what lengths we will go to find something that is lost. How many of you have lost something and turned the house or car upside down to find it? I know someone who admitted that she was searching for her cell phone using her cell phone as a flashlight and I've been known to look for my glasses when they are perched on my head.

Losing things is a common human dilemma.

I remember someone once told me that when searching for something that is missing you begin with the logical places it should be and if it's not there, then you start looking in the illogical places. A corollary to that theorem is that the older I get, I start with the illogical places - that's where I have usually placed it. Depending on what it is that we have lost, many of us will search for days and rack our brains trying to figure out where the lost item is.

One day, Jesus was teaching the crowds about the kingdom of God, when he noticed that the Pharisees and Scribes in the crowd were grumbling against him, saying things like, "Can you believe it, this fellow welcomes sinners and even eats with them." So he told them this parable to describe how God is relentless in searching for that which is lost.

“Which one of you,” he said, “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? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 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.’”

Of course the answer from his audience and from us too is, “None of us would do that, Jesus. Sure we will search for something lost, but not at the risk of everything we own.” And yet, God does. Let that sink in.

“Well, then,” Jesus continues, “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?” And of course the answer for his audience which includes us is, “I probably would search for a while but I’d be happy that I still had nine coins.” But our God searches high and low, near and far to find that which is lost. Let that sink in.

“And which business person among you, if you have a client who is having great personal difficulty, will not leave all your other clients to provide comfort and encouragement to that one client?” We all know the answer. None of us would do that. None of us. And yet our God does just that. Let that sink in.

God is in the business of seeking out the lost, and will go to any length to find lost children. And not just the obviously lost children either, but also the rest of us nice, but lost children. It’s easy to identify the obviously lost children - those incarcerated in one of the many prisons we have in Colorado, those on drugs, prostitutes, abusers, homeless, gangs, and the violent ones. God goes after them and stays after them until they breathe their last breath.

But the same is true for us. For us? Wait a minute, we’re not lost. We found our way here, didn’t we? Did we find our way or did a way find us? God is sneaky like that, letting us think we made a choice when it was God all the time drawing us to a place we need to be.

The reason we are here, in this place of sanctuary is because we know, deep within ourselves our own sense of lostness in the world. Not all the time, but there are times for all of us when we feel that we have lost our way, we have lost sight of meaning in life, we have lost a sense of purpose, we have lost enthusiasm, we have lost perspective, we have lost hope, we have lost faith, we have lost our-*selves* in the shuffle and hubbub of the world.

The Good News is that God seeks us out every bit as much as He does the obviously lost ones. God pursues us relentlessly. That must have been what Francis Thompson had in

mind when he wrote a poem entitled, "The Hound of Heaven," from which this excerpt comes:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
 I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
 I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
 Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears  
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
 Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,  
 Save Me, save only Me?  
 Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"  
 Halts by me that footfall:  
 Is my gloom, after all,  
 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
 "Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
 I am He Whom thou sleekest!  
 Thou drawest love from thee, who drawest me."

God is like the Hound of Heaven, pursuing us until the very end of our days. God doesn't give up on us, even though we may feel sure that He has. The Lord continues to dog our heels, sniffing us out, even when we are in the most illogical places. This is definitely good news for all of us.

And it is also our challenge, because we are to be imitators of this God. We are to pattern our lives after Him who sought us out and continues to seek us out every time we are lost. We have an obligation to seek out the lost outside our church. But how well have we pursued the lost outside our walls? Have we been relentless in seeking out the lost in our community?

There are folks right now, even as we worship in this lovely sanctuary, whose lives are not lovely and who desperately need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and God's grace which seeks them out no matter who or where they are. So, what's holding us back? Worshiping here with the other 99 is so comfortable and comforting. Being out there with the one is scary and risky.

Most of us know one – one who needs to know that they are loved unconditionally; one who needs a sympathetic ear; one who is lonely; one who feels a failure; one who has lost their way. We hesitate to intrude partly because we fear rejection and partly because we're not sure what to say.

We have no problem telling someone about a new restaurant we've found or a new hiking trail we've discovered. But inviting someone to worship is more personal, as it should be. Martin Luther is quoted as saying that "We are all mere beggars showing other beggars where to find food." That is how it ought to be.

In inviting someone to church we are not looking down on them, we are on the level with them. It's also not about church growth. It's about sharing an opportunity for personal growth. This is where we connect with God and each other in a special way, so why not offer this to others who have no church.

We are supposed to model ourselves after Jesus, who not only told parables about finding the lost but invited the lost into his inner circle of followers. Jesus' disciples were all lost until they recognized him as the finder of souls. Those of you who are here for the first time, welcome to a congregation of folks Jesus sought and found.

We are grateful to have been found. So grateful in fact that we will remember your name and welcome you back. So grateful that as we look around and notice friends missing from our fellowship we will reach out to them and encourage them to return. So grateful that when we encounter someone, even a stranger, who seems a bit lost, we will tell them where to find food for both body and soul.

This is not a "numbers thing," this is a "Good News Thing;" this is a "God is seeking you out thing," this is a "lost finding the lost thing." This is one place where it is safe to be lost because being lost here is to be found.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**