

Victory of the Lamb – August 8, 2020 – The One – Lost People Matter to God

Luke 15:1-7, Pastor Bill Limmer

AMBER Alerts are emergency messages issued when a law enforcement agency determines that a child has been abducted and is in imminent danger. Silver alerts are for seniors who have gone missing. AMBER and Silver Alerts instantly galvanize communities to assist in the search for and safe recovery of the person. The alerts are broadcast through radio, TV, road signs, cell phones, and other data-enabled devices. Every single time I get an amber alert on my phone or see one on a highway sign, my heart breaks. And I pray that the child is found safe. Today we are going to begin a series looking at four parables of Jesus calling us to join Jesus on his mission of an all-out search for the lost. The series is called The One.

Let's look at the scene where Jesus is at. Luke 15:1,2 **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** As Jesus has two groups of people in front of him, who most would consider rivals. The one group is the tax collectors and sinners. The other group is made up of the Pharisees and scribes. Straight up the tax collectors and sinners know they are living a jacked up, messed up. They know their lives aren't the way they are supposed to be. They know they do not deserve anything good, but they do long for acceptance, belonging, forgiveness, the peace of mind that comes from having meaning and purpose in life. My heart just kind of goes out to them because they are lost. The other group is the Pharisees and scribes. They know the rules of the law, but they did not know the grace and love of God. They know information but they don't know the transformation of mercy. My heart just kind of goes out to them because they are lost but do not know it.

Just wondering: Do you know any present-day tax collectors and sinners? Their life is far different than they dreamed of. Any Pharisees and scribes that think they have earned or deserved God's love?

What do you think: Do lost people matter to God? Let's see.

Luke 15:3-7 **Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**

Sheep, not the soft fluffy stuffed animal but the bawling, smelly, and how do I put this gently – stupid kind. They are walking lamb chops. Sheep will put themselves in danger without realizing it. When a sheep gets lost, it wanders around getting deeper and deeper into its lostness. A sheep loses its direction continually. Sheep do not mean to get lost; they just do. Sheep are different than dogs. If your dog gets lost and it sees you, it gets excited. And will stick close to you. And will follow you home. But the sheep is too dumb to do that. That is why the shepherd picks up the sheep and carries it home. The shepherd must do everything to get it safely home.

The Pharisees and scribes knew that Jesus was talking about loving and forgiving the tax collectors and sinners. And they didn't like. They thought grace was too lenient. But what the Pharisees and scribes did not get in the parable, is not only were the tax collectors and sinners the sheep, they were too. In fact,

the sheep in the parable represent all people including you and me. The point of the sheep in this story is that you and I are like sheep. Isaiah 53:6 **We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;** In the five months of pandemic, I have heard more people call other people sheep than I have in the rest of my life put together. Remember Jeff Foxworthy and that skit he did "You might be a redneck." Well you might be a sheep if you have ever watched a TV show or movie or listened to a song that highlighted sin, but you called it entertainment. You might be a sheep if you think gossip if you have come up with an excuse for gossip. You might be a sheep, if you think pornography won't hurt your marriage whether you are married or not. You might be a sheep, if you ever thought you had all the answers for how to handle the pandemic for the good of all people. You might be a sheep, if you have ever done the same stupid/sinful thing over and over. You might be a sheep, if you have ever thought you were in control and really did not need God. You might be a sheep, if you have ever given advice to God.

The Bible tells us that because of sin we were separated from God, enemies of God, lost and condemned. There is not one good thing in us. We sin because we are sinners. Everyone is a sinner. We like sheep constantly need to be forgiven, rescued time and time again. Everything needs to be done for us.

The good news is all is not lost because Luke 19:10 **Jesus came to seek and save the lost.** Jesus' primary mission was, in His own words, "to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). That tells us three things. **1. It was an all our search 2. He came for you and for all people. And 3. He is calling you to join the search.** Jesus left heaven to come and search for us to find us and rescue us and save us from the closed closets of our sinful mind, to save us from the sin of our hands, and the sin of our words.

Since Jesus went searching for the foul mouth and abrasive Peter, since he came for a guy named Paul who was persecuting his church, since he came for the cheating tax collector Matthew, since he came for James and John who struggled with anger issues, since he came for the woman caught in lust, pornography and adultery, since he came for the woman who too afraid to talk to him, since he came to feed the 5K who had no food, since he came for the little children and aged Simeon, since he came for the one who had no name, since he came and forgave the people who literally crucified him, you can know that **Jesus has come for you** as well. As irrational as it may seem, it is true. It is God. This is who God is and what he does because lost people matter that much to God.

In the parable the shepherd carries the sheep safely home. If you can picture yourself carry a 200-pound sheep, know it was not that easy. But Jesus was so committed to rescuing the lost that he left heaven for earth, gave his position and his glory, picked up all sins, every single one of them, even the ones we don't want him to pick, and with the weight of those sins on the cross he gave up his life. The cross shows how irrational the love of God is. The cross shows how much lost people matter to God. The cross of Jesus shows the heart of God for the lost. The cross of Jesus shows us how big the love of God really is. The cross of Jesus shows us far his love stretches. At the cross, Jesus takes his chance to show the heart of God to those who know they need and those who do not know they need him. All that matters is the one being returned to the many because lost people matter to God. Jesus runs to sinners.

And when the sheep is found, it is not beat for its stupidity. He is celebrated. Jesus does not beat sinners down, Jesus lifts sinners up. God does not punish you for the past he paid for the past, present and future. So, he could celebrate with us forever in heaven. As the shepherd had joy in finding his sheep. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Heaven celebrates sinners saved by grace. For those

of you worshipping who are Christians, when you came to faith, heaven went crazy. And for those of you who do not yet believe that Jesus is your Savior, know that heaven is anticipating, is ramping up, praying that you will believe. Because a celebration is about to happen!

Jesus wants ALL people to be found. In John 10 Jesus tells that he has other sheep. There more people to be found. Who are the other sheep? Who are the lost? Often this is the person is confused about his or her real direction in life because they don't know there is more to life than physical and material pursuits. A lost person is spiritually separated from God because of sin and is frustrated with life. Often people who are lost are tired of existence, hungry for meaning, purpose, and identity.

Even if Amber Alerts and Silver Alerts are not rattling our phone or showing up on highway signs, God has lost children and Jesus wants us to join with him in an all-out search for the lost. Every lost person makes God's heart race and I hope every lost person makes my heart and yours race too.

Christianity is the biggest search and rescue mission the world has ever seen because lost people matter to God. In fact, this is what this church we call Victory is all about. God has positioned us and called us to be an outward facing and outward focusing church. Victory is called to go and grow.

I have been praying so hard in this time of physical distancing to have someone to share the gospel with. And I got a phone call last week. Never talked to the person before on the phone. He wants me to come over to his house for a small group gathering to share the gospel with his family. Are you kidding me? Only God. Woohoo!

Not only is it **the church's mission it is also your mission**. You are called to the same relentless pursuit of the lost within your sphere of influence. God has placed you in your neighborhood, your job, your school, your activity, your social media platform for a grander purpose than a place to live, make money, to learn or have fun. He is FOR the One. (Put sermon series slide back on screen). He has you there to join him on his mission of The One. Do you have your one? Pray for your one, seek your one, share the love of Jesus with your one.

This season that we are in right NOW is the best, greatest, easiest time to invite people to come and see, come and hear, come and explore in the most non-threatening way imaginable—online or in person. At votl.life there is an invite card it is "called inviting someone to church." Think of it this way: who is in your sphere of influence? Who needs the love of Jesus in their life at your workplace, your neighborhood, your daycare, your friends? You can make a difference. You can be an agent of change. You can invite people into relationship with God that will never fail and that has eternal significance. How cool is that. You in?! I am.

Prayer: Lord Give me, give each one of us, give Victory, the loving spirit of searching for the one because lost people matter to you O God. Amen.