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# Trinity News

## **Pentecost XVII Searching for Identity in What Has Been Lost.**

The text of the Gospel today from Luke 15:1-10 is deceptively simple. It poses no intricate human or theological problems. But it does touch on a critical aspect of identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the sense of a loss of soul-identity. It is an ancient human concern, not just ours. Jesus warned about the dangers of losing our own soul by frantically looking for false antidotes to ease a sense of being empty and lost. The context for these stories about loss in Luke 15 is Jesus' response to the criticism of the Pharisees and their scribes that he welcomed sinners and dared to eat with them. It is about inclusion and exclusion.

The Shepherd of 100 sheep chases after a lost sheep, leaving the other 99 behind in a barren and hostile environment. He rejoices when he finds it and carries it back on his shoulder. It must have been a small sheep and exhausted from its wanderings! Later at home he gathers friends and neighbours and announces the good news. The extravagant love of God is displayed in the diligence of the shepherd's search for the lost sheep. Jesus concludes that there will be more rejoicing in heaven over a repentant sinner than 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent. Jesus means those who are truly righteous in their hearts and minds and constantly aware of their need for the mercy and forgiveness of God. The joy in heaven again emphasises the extravagant love of God. The parable quickly turns from lost sheep to lost people. It is the mission of the Son of Man "to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

The second parable has a woman seeking for one lost coin out of 10. The nine remain in her purse but she has only one focus, the lost coin. When she finds it she rejoices and shares her joy with friends and neighbours. We are often unaware of the whispers of the dove of the Spirit and heart-messages of the angels. Their rejoicing is due to the repentant sinner hearing their message.

These parables are a slap in the face to religious exclusionists in every age. The lost sheep is a symbol for those who are lost and wandering aimlessly in the world. We came from a warm and safe place before our birth and then we emerged into the light of day and the scrutiny of others. Some of the scrutiny was welcome and some was not. A negative example is being engulfed by some over-enthusiastic relative. The smiles of those who would always love us were no doubt hugely encouraging. As the apostle Paul says, only love remains. "Neither life nor death.... nor anything else in the whole of creation can separate us from the love of God that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Within the love of Christ we place all the loves we have known in this life, those lost and those retained. We should share them with him and he will always affirm our joys and console our sorrows. The Shepherd of souls accompanies us on the search for what is lost and rejoices with us when we discover it. Perhaps we will learn afresh to place it in the context of his overarching love. He is the friend of all who love him and many who don't.

Bishop Arthur Jones

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### **THIS WEEK:**

- Sept. 16 (Monday).
  - Finance Meeting, 5:30pm, Parish Office
  - Vestry Meeting, 6:30pm, Rectory
- Sept. 18 (Wednesday).
  - Bible Study, 10:00am.
- Sept. 19, (Thursday).
  - Midweek Eucharist, 10:00am, Chapel

### **COMING UP:**

- Sept. 29th
  - Joint service, 9:00am. Lunch follows.
- Oct. 20. Harvest Sunday.

### **NEXT SUNDAY'S READINGS:**

Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 138  
1 Timothy 2:1-8; Luke 16:1-13