

Our first reading is from Psalm 51, one to 17. Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your unfailing love, because of Your great compassion. Blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from guilt, purify me from sin, for I recognize my rebellion. It haunts me day and night against you. And you alone have I sinned. I have done what is evil in Your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just, for I was born a sinner. Yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again you have broken me, now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt, created me a clean heart. O God, renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and make me willing to obey you.

Then I will teach Your ways to rebels, and they will return to you. Forgive me for shedding up blood, O God who saves. Then I will joyfully sing of Your forgiveness. Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you. You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart of God.

Part of the Word.

Please stand for the Gospel reading. Today's reading is from Luke, chapter 15, verses one through ten. Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people and even eating with them. So Jesus told them this story if a man has 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the 99 others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home in his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep. And in the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over 99 others who are righteous and haven't strayed away. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, rejoice for me because I have found my lost coin.

In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.

The world of the world.

Come on up here. Yes. Now, what do I have here? Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah. Now, if I want to turn this off, can I turn this off?

Yeah.

How? I just press the back button like that. Right. Now, there's a bigger light that shines in this world. It's called the sun. Right. If I wanted the sun to stop shining, could I make the sun stop shining? Yeah. I know I couldn't. It's still shining. It's just on the other side of the world. That's right. I can't make the sun stop shining. But you know who can? God. That's right. And today you're going to learn about a time when somebody prayed for God to make the sun stand still in the sky so that it would shine longer than 24 hours. That would shine, like, even throughout the night. Isn't that something? It's something that only God can do, but that somebody asks God by prayer. So you're going to learn about the power of prayer. You're going to learn about the power of God today. And Lucas is going to pray for us as you all head up. Come on over here, Lucas.

God help us to understand you better. We want to understand the depths of your holiness, goodness and love. Give us wisdom to understand who you are so that we can love you more and obey you well. Amen.

Amen. All right. Enjoy. Kids alive.

Good morning. It's good to be with you all. Let's pray together. Our Father, on this morning of September 11, may we enter Your presence with broken and contrite hearts for all those who were made orphans and widows some 21 years ago this morning. And may we also enter Your presence with humble and hopeful hearts, open to allowing the two edged sword of Your word to penetrate deep into each of our hearts, our souls, this morning. So now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. Well, the text from this morning that Lauren just read to us begins with some quite respectable folks mumbling to one another. Another translation says, they were grumbling. And yet another says, muttering. I love the word muttering. I really do. I'm glad somebody invented that word. But you can sort of picture, right, these quite respectable folks, these pharisees and teachers of the law, were mumbling, grumbling, muttering to one another about some far less respectable folks, sinners and tax collectors whom Jesus had chosen to befriend. Look at those people. You can imagine them muttering and grumbling and muttering.

Look at them. Sinners and tax collectors. Shameful as they are, they don't belong here among us, with Christ, with Jesus. They're good for nothing. They're stained on our society. They deserve only what they have coming to them, and nothing better. What is Jesus thinking? Compromising his reputation and ours for riff RAF like them. Come on, have some decency. Steer clear of such vermin. We cross the street to avoid them, those people. We all know what this sort of muttering and mumbling and grumbling sounds like. I might even add to the list in our present day Twittering. Mumbling and grumbling and twittering, muttering about them, those people, whatever them you prefer, the disreputable subset of our citizenry. Have you ever found yourself muttering in this way? I am sorry to say that I do much more often than I would like to admit. Whether it's somebody driving poorly around me or someone whose idea I think is misguided, or someone who just hasn't arrived at the conclusion that I would want them to arrive at whatever it might be. It could be worse than that. But I'm a mutterer sometimes. A grumbler, a mumblor, a twitterer.

I don't tweet. But many people do in this way. So that's where the text begins. Today. Jesus responds to their muttering with a parable. The text says, Jesus tells a parable. Did you catch that? In the ESV in the NIV, King James tells a parable. And it's a parable in three parts. There's three parts, count them. The parable of the lost sheep, which is our primary text for this morning. The parable of the lost coin, which we also heard read this morning. And there's a third part to this parable. It's the parable of the prodigal son. Now, you're all familiar with that. It's probably the most famous story that Jesus told. It's actually the parable, or the story of the prodigal sons. Not one son, but two sons. So three stories in which something precious is lost. A sheep, right? One out of 10 sheep is lost. Then a coin, one out of ten coins is lost. Then a son, one out of two sons is lost, goes off, goes missing, goes astray. And then the other son lost in his complacent pride, in his pious superiority. So something precious is lost in each of these three stories to this parable.

And then an emphatic and unreserved search is immediately launched. And there is great joy and celebration each time when that which was lost is found. Not just high fives and dance of joy, but the finding becomes an occasion for throwing a party and inviting the whole neighborhood. Did you pick that up? All three times? So Jesus responds to the muttering of the Pharisees and the scribes with this parable. One parable in three movements. Now, I'm sure you can think of a time when you lost something that was important enough to you that you dropped everything to find it. I know I have. I'm sure you can remember what it felt like to actually find it or to not find it, as the case may have been a couple of months ago this summer, Berkeley, who is our year and a half old beagle puppy went missing one morning. Probably slipped through an opening in our fence. She's pretty small. She's like this big. Some of you know her. And we discovered that she was lost. She was gone. We looked around. We called for actually, we searched all day. I mean, I searched in the morning, in the afternoon, and the evening pretty much non stop.

The kids made signs, we posted them up all around the neighborhood. We searched all day. I even slept on the porch that night, thinking that if she came home and we were all asleep and she came to the door and barked and yelped, we wouldn't know that she was there and she'd run away again. So I slept on the porch so I wouldn't miss her. We all thought if she's gone overnight, there's very little hope of her returning. So we thought she'll come back. For a puppy of Berkeley's size and limited

intelligence, a lost dog is probably a dead dog. So we feared the worst. I also had this fear that I would actually find her in all my searching, and she would kind of be off at a distance, and I would call to her to come, but she would actually run off into the woods. After all, she is a beagle. She follows her nose, she chases whatever her nose sends her after, and she's very playful. So I feared that I would see her, I would be within the grasp of getting her back and would lose her again. And she's just not that smart.

So we went to sleep that night, me on the porch. We woke up the next morning still no Berkeley. So the tragic reality that she was probably not coming home started to set in for Sarah, me and the kids. And we were all crushed. We were really crushed. And then later that morning, more than 24 hours later, when all hope was lost, she reappeared. She showed up at the front door. Her nose must have led her back home. She was hungry, she was thirsty, she was slightly crusty and possibly pregnant. We didn't know. We wondered. But there was unparalleled relief, rejoicing, and celebration in our family. Right, Mason? Big time. I didn't even realize how much I liked this little dog until she went missing and returned. I'm sure you can think of your own experiences of finding something valuable that had gone missing or had wandered off, and the utter elation of finding it at last, perhaps even after temporarily, like us, losing hope of ever finding it. So this three part parable of things lost and then found with rejoicing. This is how Jesus responds to the grumbling of the Pharisees and the religious leaders who cannot come to terms with the sort of people Jesus is dignifying with his friendship.

So he begins the parable with the story of the lost sheep. And that is our main text for this morning. That's where I'll spend most of our time. And Jesus says, who among you, having 100 sheep, if you lost one, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it. And then when he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Now, this metaphor of God as the Great Shepherd, which would have been quite relevant for Jesus contemporaries, it's an echo of several Old Testament stories and texts. God is described as the shepherd of Israel in various psalms and in Jeremiah and in Ezekiel, just to name a few. Psalm 23 you'll know well the Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. And in Psalm 80, hear us, shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. And then there is the severe word of the Lord from Jeremiah in chapter 23. I wonder if you remember this one. Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord. He goes on to say, I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. Very similar text to that also appears in Ezekiel 34. Bless you. Now, it's worth noting that if Jesus's parable of the lost sheep is meant to use sheep as an example of people, which I think it is, this metaphor is not meant to be a compliment. If we're the sheep in this story, that's not a compliment. I think when we hear a metaphor of God being the Great Shepherd and God's people as sheep, we tend to think of ourselves as these kind of sweet, cuddly little puffs of wool being hoisted gently on Jesus shoulders and nestling our fluffy little white heads into his neck.

And that's a fine, comforting image to have for the Great Shepherd. That's okay, but listen to what an actual shepherd who later becomes a pastor, has to say about actual sheep. This is what he says. His name is Philip Keller, and he says, a sheep is a stupid animal. It loses its direction continually in a way a cat or dog never does. Even when you find a lost sheep, the lost sheep rushes to and fro and will not follow you home. Kind of the fear I had with our puppy. So when you find it, you must seize it, throw it to the ground, tie its fore legs and hind legs together, put it over your shoulder and carry it home. That's the only way to save a lost sheep. Now, does that sound familiar to you at all? I mean, I don't know about you all, but that at least sometimes describes me in my life of faith. This is me in my walk with Christ. I am sometimes a sheep, or at least more like a sheep than like a dog that comes quickly when its master calls him by his name. So this is us sometimes.

We can be more like sheep than like. The master's best friend. Isaiah 53 says, all we like sheep have

gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him, on Christ, the iniquity of us all. The Anglican Church in North America refreshed the Prayer Book a few years ago, 2019, I think, to try to more accurately reflect translation from the earlier editions of the Prayer Book. And in that prayer book, the general confession which we recite each week together, they have a version that's a little bit different, and I quite like it. It opens like this. It says almighty and most merciful Father, we have ailed and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. And apart from Your grace, there is no health in us. It goes on. So we are more often like sheep than like dogs and cats. We sometimes simply wander off.

I do at least. We become disoriented, distracted. Our heads are down, grazing on whatever pasture is presently under our noses, and we can find ourselves far from the shepherd in the sheepfold, sometimes even wandering into harm's way and then startled when the shepherd appears to rescue us. We sometimes kick and we buck, we resist, we even stubbornly flee. And the text says verse five and when he has found the lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulders. Rejoicing notice also in this first story that the shepherd in Jesus story does not just go after the lost sheep, but actually also leaves the other 99 in the open country or in the wilderness, as some translations say. He leaves the other 99 in the wilderness to go and find the one lost sheep. So I am not sure how devoted the actual shepherds in Jesus' day would have been to rescuing solitary wayward sheep. In fact, it is safe to assume that going on a recovery operation for one lost sheep would naturally result in 99 more lost sheep. But in Jesus telling of the story, he makes a point to emphasize this this commitment, this determination on the part of the shepherd reflecting on Jesus peculiar point of emphasis here.

An Episcopal priest, Father Robert Ferrar Capin, writes this. He says, quote, I think it best to assume that Jesus is parabolically, thumping the tub for the saving paradox of lostness. What does he mean by that? Jesus implies, it seems to me, that even here it is even if all 100 sheep should get lost, it would not be a problem for this bizarrely good shepherd because he is first and foremost in the business of finding the lost. Give him a world with 100 out of every hundred souls lost. Give him, in other words, the world full of losers. That is the only real world we have, and it will do just fine. Lostness is exactly his cup of tea. It is precisely lostness, Capan says, not goodness that commends the sheep to God. We should also pause in this story to note how vividly the image of joy and celebration is portrayed in all three movements of this parable. In each case, when what was lost is found, there is extraordinary communal rejoicing. When the lost sheep is found and set upon the shepherd's shoulders, the text says, and when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I found my sheep that was lost.

Similarly, when the woman finds the lost coin, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I have lost. And when the prodigal son comes home we didn't read this this morning, but you remember this when the prodigal son comes home, the text says, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. And the father said to his servants, quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. That's what the prodigal son story celebration looks like. So joy is a central theme of this parable, which Jesus drives all the way home in the concluding statement at the end of the first two movements saying, I tell you, he says this, Jesus says, I tell you, taking the point all the way home, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Okay, now, Jesus, remember, Jesus tells this parable in response to something. There is an occasion for this telling of the parable. It's not random. He tells it in response to the pharisees who are grumbling and muttering about the quality of Jesus table companions. They're grumbling about the respectability, the decency, the reputability, the integrity, the honesty, the virtue, the decentness, the properness, or lack thereof of these people Jesus is dignifying with his presence. These people Jesus is honoring with his hospitality. These people Jesus is qualifying with his whole hearted friendship. I have to ask myself, who is in that category for me? Who's in these people category for me? Who are

those people in my heart? Who do I believe in my heart even if I were not likely to admit it out loud? Who is beyond the pale, unworthy to be given the time of day threat to my own dignity and respectability, to be associated with those people in any way? Who are those for me? The word that Luke uses here for mumbling and grumbling and muttering, it's a word that's used very infrequently. In fact, it's first used in Scripture, in the Old Testament, in the story of Exodus.

People of God, remember this the people of God, after being rescued from slavery in Egypt and walking straight through the Red Sea led by Moses and Aaron, they've had several very difficult weeks of journeying through the wilderness. And they are hungry and they are tired and they are afraid. Exodus 16 two says in the desert, the whole community grumbled. Same word that Luke uses. The whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. You see, their grumbling tells us that they are not sure this is what they signed up for. They find themselves in an unfamiliar wilderness they had not anticipated. We were good with the Red Sea splitting triumphs, but not this. We're hungry, we're spent, we're irritated. If this is what you're asking for from us, maybe we would have been better off remaining enslaved to Pharaoh. At least we knew what to expect. And there was food there.

They mumbled, grumbled and muttered, just like the Pharisees and scribes are doing with Jesus. Jesus's association with the rabble of Samaria. Those people seems utterly disorienting, utterly disorienting to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They are not sure this is what they signed up for. They are finding themselves in an unfamiliar wilderness they had not anticipated. Sure, Jesus, it's one thing to heal the sick and raise the dead and bring justice to the earth, but don't eat with them. What are you thinking, Jesus? As Christians living in a broken world of fear and of hatred and despair, we see it all the time of rampant abuse, unfaithfulness love of money and power and prestige preoccupation with vanity. We Christians, we face the same temptations to sin as everyone else. Sin of pride, of envy, of lust, prejudice, of overconsumption, of laziness. And we are susceptible to them all. But there is one sin in particular that I think we Christians are especially vulnerable to, and often without even knowing that it has seized upon us. We Christians as people who rightly love righteousness, who pursue what is good and pleasing and right, who rightly aspire to righteous living.

We can be especially vulnerable to the sin of self righteousness, a self righteousness that has the ability to take root in our hearts and grow there in the most insidious way. What do I mean by that? It's because it is cultivated. This self righteousness is cultivated by a right and good promotion of righteousness. It is nurtured by a right and good striving after moral uprightness in the way that we live. And I think that this parable that Jesus tells to the Pharisees, which is also a reflection of Israel's grumbling, it provides one of the most prophetic words for the respectable American believer in Christ today, like me, for those of us who are responsible and live respectable lives. It is a word from the Lord to us about an invasive shrub of self righteousness that can grow in among the fruits of the Spirit, blocking out light and stealing precious nutrients. This parable is a word from the Lord to us that we really need to hear. It's a word that we need to be sharper than any double edged sword, as we read in Hebrews. Sharper than a double edged sword, penetrating deep dividing joint and marrow, judging our thoughts and attitudes and our mutterings, our Twitterings, our grumblings, especially as it relates to those who we judge to be unsavory, disreputable people around us.

If Jesus favors the lost, as we see in this lost sheep story, even those people sometimes we're not sure if that's what we signed up for. The bad news here is that in my self righteousness, I become like a saint gone astray believers, worshippers of Christ who are actually wandering off from the heart of the good shepherd himself. That's the bad news. The good news, the gospel news is that the shepherd is out looking for us. Jesus is out looking for us. It's you and me, lost at times, maybe, in our self righteousness as much as it is those unsavory, disreputable sinners and tax collectors that Jesus leaves the other 99 to go out and find. Jesus is looking for us. That's the good news, friends. It's really good news. And this, of course, is how the whole parable ends. Remember, Jesus is telling one parable in three parts the lost and found sheep, the lost and found coin, the lost and found son. And finally, don't miss it the elder son. You remember the elder son from the parable of the prodigal son story. The elder son, who is no less lost than the younger son.

The older son, as you will recall, is thoroughly convinced that by the merits of his own effort and achievement, his faithfulness, his virtue, his uprightness, his work ethic and loyalty, his own extraordinary competence. He is quite certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he is deserving of a just reward and that his brother is not. Jesus tells this whole parable to the mumbling, grumbling, muttering assembly of Pharisees and scribes similarly convinced that by the merits of their efforts and achievements and faithfulness and virtue and loyalty, they are quite certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that some people like them, are deserving of a just reward and others are not. The whole parable that Jesus tells whole parable culminates at the end with the elder Son in the prodigal story grappling with whether to hold tightly to his own merits or to lay them down at the altar of the Father's grace and love and mercy and to join the reunion feast. And we don't actually know how he responds, do we? If you read that story again, it just ends with a cliffhanger. We don't know how the story ends for the elder brother.

And I wonder if this is because the mumbling. Grumbling. Muttering pharisees and teachers of the law are the elder brother in the story. And the question of whether to let go of his self righteousness and join the celebration. To lay it down at the altar and join the reunion feast is the exact question Jesus presents to the pharisees and teachers of the law at the end of this parable. How will they respond? How will they end the story? What ending will they give to this long three part parable? This question is also the exact question before you and me this morning how will this parable end in our lives today? This week, the scene in Luke's Gospel occurs right in the middle of the Samaria travel story, right in the middle of being on the way to Jerusalem, highlighting its central significance for all disciples who are following Jesus to Jerusalem. We have to answer the question will we hold tightly to our own merits, or will we lay them all down on the altar of the Father's grace, love and mercy and join the celebration feast? Let me wrap it up. As we noted a few minutes ago, Jesus concludes the first two of his stories, the lost sheep and the lost coin, saying, I tell you, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

You remember that takes the message all the way home. This is the kind of joy there will be in heaven over anyone, even those people. The word for repentance here is the word metanoia. Meta meaning after and Noah having to do with thinking or the mind. And so metanoia means a change of one's mind or a change of one's heart. So metanoia or repentance is a dramatic change in how we see all of reality. It means you have a new mind. Metanoia repentance means to wake up and see it all differently. For some, this. Happens in the blink of an eye. Maybe some of you have had that experience when you became a Christian. For others, it happens more slowly over time. That's been more of my experience. When we think of repentance, we sometimes we often put the onus on the one who repents. That is, repentance is an act of will. I acknowledge that I am a sinner, and now I see with a whole new mind the reality of my sin. I acknowledge that I've gone stray and I turn around. I turn around 180 and I return to the good shepherd.

And that is all part of the journey of faith. Don't hear me disqualify that's part of the journey of faith, but this parable from Jesus helps to put it all in the right perspective for us. I think we can all agree that the lost sheep and lost coin in their lostness could do nothing to find themselves a lost sheep. Cannot do anything to find itself a lost coin. Certainly cannot. Doesn't even know it's lost. If not for the shepherd's initiative to find the lost sheep and the woman's determination in finding the lost coin, they would have remained lost. Both the sheep and the coin are entirely at the mercy of another, and they have nothing at all to offer to their own rescue operations. Nothing at all. Remember the words of Romans five eight? While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Repentance itself is an act of grace. Repentance metanoia, a dramatic reawakening to have a new mind and to see it all selfworld. Others in the light of Christ's truth is received as a gift by grace alone. While we were still sinners, I tell you, Jesus says there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

There is joy in heaven when by grace alone one who was blind now can see. There is joy in heaven by grace alone, when one who was lost now is found. And there's joy in heaven when by grace alone those who once took refuge in the safety and security of their own merit and achievement now lay it all down on the altar and receive the righteousness not of self, but of Christ. Receive the

righteousness not of self, but of Christ. And then by grace alone join the banquet feast of the great shepherd who became a sheep so that he could become the Lamb. Am of God. Thanks, Peter God. Amen.