

Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28; 1 Timothy 1: 12-17; Luke 15: 1-10

The Chief Executive Officer of a very large company called the home of one of his employees about an urgent problem with one of the main computers. His call was attended by the child, and whispered, "Hello?"

The CEO asked, "Is your Daddy home?" "Yes," whispered the small voice.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked.

To the boss' surprise, the small voice said, "No."

The caller persisted, "Is your Mommy there?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"May I talk with her?"

Again, the child said, "No."

"Well, is there someone else there I might talk to?" the CEO asked the child.

"Yes, a policeman." said the child.

"Well then, may I speak with the policeman?"

"No, he is busy." said the child.

"Busy doing what?" asked the boss.

The child said, "Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the Fireman."

Now the caller was growing concerned and just then he heard what sounded like a helicopter in the background, so he asked, "What is that noise?"

The child said, "A helicopter."

The boss nearly shouted: "What is going on there?" In a whispering voice, the child answered, "The search team just landed the helicopter!"

"Why are they there?"

The child said, "They are looking for me ... they think I'm lost!"

Loss of our beloved ones or losing precious thing is an experience of heart-breaking. It is very difficult to overcome such situations. But when we get it back, we rejoice and share joy with our family, neighbours and friends.

In today's gospel passage we see two parables; the lost sheep and the lost coin. Both parables point out a great truth that God sent his son Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost people. Let us look into the first parable, the parable of the lost sheep. I think, no shepherd wants to lose a sheep, but there again no shepherd would leave ninety-nine in the wilderness to go after one single lost sheep. He could be sure that when he returned his rejoicing would be turned into mourning while he found that the ninety-nine were now lost as well.

The shepherd in Judea had a hard and dangerous task. There was very less pastoral land. The narrow central plateau was only a few miles

wide, then it plunged down to the wild cliffs and the terrible devastation of the desert. The sheep would wander since there were no restraining walls. The shepherd was personally responsible for the sheep. If a sheep was lost the shepherd must at least bring home the fleece to show how it had died. These shepherds were experts in tracking and follow the straying sheep's footprints for miles across the hills.

William Barclay in his commentary on Luke's gospel reveals the nature of the flocks. He says that many of the flocks were communal flocks, and they were not belonging to individuals, but to villages. There would be two or three shepherds in charge. Those whose flocks were safe would arrive home on time and bring news that one shepherd was still out on the mountain side searching for a sheep which was lost. Then the whole village would join the search team to search the lost sheep. It was always a joyous moment when they would see the shepherd striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders. The whole community would celebrate this with a shout of joy and of thanksgiving.

People without a saving relationship with Jesus are lost because they wander away from God and the things of God, and they do so because of their sinful nature. Jesus Christ does not want even one single person to be lost, and he is prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to seek out the sinner and enable him/her to be reconciled. Jesus Christ values the life of people who are spiritually in danger. He wants us to learn from this parable that we are called to carry out the ministry of shepherding. When we accept his call, we must incline our ears to listen to the cries of the lost sheep.

The second parable is about the lost coin. In this parable we see a woman had ten silver coins and she lost one. In a Palestinian peasant's house, it would take a long search to find the lost coin. The houses were very dark, because their circular shape of small windows could not give enough light. The floor was used to keep dried reeds and rushes; and to look for a coin on a floor like that was like looking for a needle in a haystack. The woman swept the floor in the hope that she might see the coin glint or hear it tinkle as it moved. The value of the lost coin was the value of a day's wage. To a man, losing a day's wage is not a big deal, he'll just have to work another day to replace it. It is significant, but not that much. But the woman does not have the same potential to replace it. She must find it.

It is very much interesting to see how much efforts she put in searching the lost coin. She lights a lamp, she sweeps the floor, she searches carefully until she finds it. She doesn't stop, because that coin

is precious to her. To others, it is not a big deal, but to her, it is irreplaceable. She has to find it. Finding that lost coin is worth whatever effort it takes because it cannot be replaced. It is all she has. And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' Those who get it will celebrate, those who see the lost ones as simply low value commodities will not join the celebration at all.

Through these parables Jesus Christ asks us to value people who are spiritually lost like He values people, seeing them as precious. We have to share our Lord's perspective that the lost people are worth, and therefore all the spiritual effort we undertake must help them to find Jesus, and we must share the joy when they are "found."

St Paul to 1st Timothy 1: 12-15 expresses his gratitude to Jesus for finding him from the strayed life and appointing him to the service of God's kingdom. He affirms that "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost."

I want to highlight one thing here about God's relationship with us. He is a loving shepherd, leading us towards the green pastures. He carries us when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, and he reaches us when we are away from him. He provides us so well for us that we could say that our cup is running over with his blessings. Being his disciples let us carry out his ministry of shepherding to save people those who are spiritually in danger. Amen.