Text: Luke 15:1-10

**Introduction**

I wish that could have found a better emotional handle for today. But the closest thing I could come up with is what one word might you use to label the years since 9/11. These years of war and rumor of war. Division and rankor. Epidemics you are allowed to talk about and the opioid epidemic that you are not. And the word that I would keep coming back to was lost. From our leadership in all sectors that appears lost to the homeless lost on the street to entire generations spiritually lost.

The first two sections of any classical work of theology are the doctrine of God and the doctrine of man. If you were attempting to put modern labels on them you might say philosophy and anthropology. And that attempt to translate the classical into the modern points at some of the problem. The modern methodology is very useful for finding out a lot of information about one specific thing. And having lots of information makes us think we aren’t lost. But each area is its own field. Anthropology assumes a philosophy, today usually atheistic materialism, and proceeds by all its own rules. And all the modern fields of study do the same thing. Occasionally they check with stuff outside of them – “interdisciplinary study” – but that is usually half-hearted. The modern method is to divide: anthropology spawns sociology. Sociology spawns psychology and economics, and so on. Now my tracing of lineage might be a little off. But truth, if each subject would still talk about truth, is found in some very specific atomized model of both God and man.

And here, at least for me, is the great problem. I don’t find any of those specific models and their explanations to be very convincing. They seem lost. Economics posits that we are all utility maximizing consumers. But just looking at the variety of houses available, and how people choose where to live, should cast all kinds of doubt on any bloodless utility maxing model of humans. And each subject has their reigning models. Even Physics has quantum string theory. The equations seem to work. They produce testable things, if you have billions of dollars to build very specific things like a large hadron collider. But if you ask what does it mean – Luther’s great catechism question – it all either goes silent or starts talking about untestable multiverses more fit for comic book movies. The physics needs a metaphysics and today it would rather adopt a very silly one.

The classic doctrines had to hold together. They could not atomize. How you identify most heresies is that they all overdevelop one part of the creed – that rule of faith - at the expense of everything else. The Arian heresy, the first great one, overdevelops a generic philosophical God at the expense of the Jesus who became man born of the virgin Mary yet who was true god. Modern heresies all skip over “he was crucified under Pontius Pilate” and ignore that our hope, what we look for, is “the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” We want it now in this creation, because we have lost the faith in God’s promise. We have gone lost. And so the word of the cross becomes unbearable.

**Text**

Ok, I’ll drop the “deep-thoughts” by Pastor Brown and get to the point. One of the best apologetics, arguments for the truth of the scriptural story, is how compelling are its models of who we are and who God is. Reading the bible stories is reading something much more True.

Our gospel text this morning divides humanity into two groups. There are the tax collectors and sinners, and there are the pharisees who are grumbling about Jesus “receiving tax collectors and sinners.” So seeing this, Jesus starts telling a series of parables. And the parables are telling us a story of God and a story of man. The easiest one to start with I think is the story of man. Simply, we are lost.

Like sheep we get lost. And by this time I hope all of you have seen the youtube video of the man pulling out the sheep stuck headfirst in the ditch. That sheep freed immediately takes three or four jumps and falls headfirst back into the ditch about 20 feet from where it was just pulled out. We get lost and then we do it again. And then we invent new ways of getting lost. And while lost we tell ourselves we aren’t lost. And we tell ourselves that no, we have not seen this place before. And we tell ourselves that no, those are not wolves out there, they just want to help us. So we vote for the wolves again. The bible’s anthropology is very low. We humans are a bunch of sheep. A bunch of lost jackwagons.

And the only meaningful division among us is those of us who have recognized this – commonly called “sinners” – and those of us who think we – or at least our particular kind – aren’t that bad – commonly called pharisees.

The lostness of the coin is interesting in what it adds. Coins belong to somebody. Finders keepers is the normal rule. Coins are also worth something. Even if they are lost, they are worth something. Its not that sheep aren’t worth something, but the story of the good shepherd is supposed to be a shocking one. A shepherd doesn’t really leave 99 in the open country to find the one. But that is getting into the story of God.

We all might be lost sheep, but we are also lost coins. Something is going to find us. First a coin can’t find itself. The coin doesn’t think or know it is lost. But from the owner’s perspective it is. And most things that find us will eat us alive or put us in their account. But just because we are lost doesn’t mean that we are worthless. We still bear the image of the monarch.

The bible’s depiction of us – of humanity -, silly lost things liable to be found and eaten, but still of worth, is more robust than any psychology or sociology or -ology dreamed up yet. How well Jesus knows us is one of the greatest testimonies to the truth of His proclamation. Only the maker knows the made so well. Only the potter knows the clay.

And that crosses back into the picture of God. God is the one who finds the lost. Unlike how we would really act, God leaves the 99 in the open country to find the one who is really lost. Of course I think hovering in the background here is that all 100 are lost, even if 99 are in the open country. Today is just the day that the good shepherd has to retrieve this specific one. The rest are still in the open country. Liable to wander off, get lost, run into wolves. God is a God who not only comes to the open country but also pursues the lost into wilderness.

And maybe a better refinement. Christ has pursued us into the wilderness of this fallen and lost world. We are not in the open country, not yet. That fair and fine grazing land is something we might see in the distance. We are being lead to green pastures…to full tables. But today we still wander. Today the fullness of the table is under bread and wine. Today we will eat while our enemies, the wolves, are around. But the shepherd has found us and leads us.

The picture of God is a surprising one because how do we really look for lost money? Maybe if we lost a $100 bill we clean everything. We make distinction between the value of what is lost. But mostly we say “it will turn up.” God is the woman who cleans the entire house to find that coin, regardless the denomination. Because that coin is worth something. And it doesn’t matter what value we silly lost things might put on it. It’s value is complete to God.

Christ has come to redeem sinners. Jesus came to clean the house. Jesus came to prevent Satan from scooping up his coins that bear his image. The Son of God became the Son of Man, taking on our likeness, so that he could come to this wilderness and clean us.

The Bible’s picture of God is its greatest apologetic. This is not some far off distance god. This is not some unmoved mover. This is not some philosophical necessity. This is the God who rejoices. This is the God who invites all of creation – the angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven, the apostles, prophets, martyrs and the entire mighty throng, to join with him in rejoicing. He has found what he came for. Jesus found sinners and shepherds them. He has cleaned them by his blood and made them heirs of the image of the King we all bear. And he invites us all to rejoice in this mighty and unending work of his. We were lost and now have been found.

**Conclusion**

It is that invitation to the celebration that rankles. The scene of King David dancing before the ark comes to mind. Such a monarch that would lose his regal bearing in dance offended. Some of the hosts of heaven apparently would remain outside. When asked to rejoice at God’s plan, to join him in praise, they wouldn’t. Now Satan knows better, so that is a knowing act of will, of pride. And those powers that be are certainly out there inspiring the same Pride in Pharisees of all ages. We want God to conform to our ideas of god. We will hold on to our idols – our false gods – because they tell us the false anthropologies – the false doctrines of man – that we also desire. And we’d rather have our false gods and men than the reality. We’d rather stay lost.

But the invitation stands. Jesus receives sinners. Come, a table has been prepared for you. Join in the celebration. Christ has found you and claimed you and given you a complete inheritance. Don’t stay outside the party, it’s really the saints that are much more fun. They know where they are, and are free. Free to rejoice. Amen.