

Luke 15,3-6

Losing, seeking, finding – being lost, being looked for, being found – these are experiences that each of us have had in our life. Not just once but again and again. For example, how often do I look for my keys. What a relief it is when I find them right away, and how frustrating it is when I am late for an appointment or when I have to hurry to catch the bus because I wasted so much time looking for them.

Looking, seeking, finding – being lost, being looked for, being found – is a part of daily life. And we encounter these experiences in the parable of the lost sheep. A lost sheep is actually not a big deal. It probably bleats more often than usual, and the shepherd who is looking for it probably more often curses under his breath. And that's that. And this simple experience leads us to a new experience – an experience with God. When Jesus tells us a parable, he wants to tell us something about God. And everyday experiences should help lead us to a discovery of who God really is.

Actually it is just one question – one irresistible question which Jesus asks his audience: Isn't it true, that if you have 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, wouldn't you leave the 99 sheep alone, in order to look for the lost one until you have found it? And when you have found it, will you not rejoice and carry your sheep on your shoulders? And when you get home wouldn't you call to your friends and neighbours and tell them: rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep – wouldn't you?! Jesus wants his listeners to agree with him. He is looking for our consent.

There is no mention of God in his question. The parable tells us about an ordinary event during that period. And this ordinary event tells us about God without ever mentioning God. God has to be found. God always needs to be found in our world. Not because he can get lost like a sheep, or a coin or a son. No – God never gets lost. Things get lost. Values get lost. Moral standards get lost, people get lost. These are our experiences. But God he seeks that which is lost. And because he seeks, we can discover him. We can discover him in this parable, although he goes unmentioned. The parable is about people – about us. But we also have to find ourselves in this parable. Who are we: the seeker? Or are we the one who has been lost? Or are we the one who has been found? Or are we any of them?

Let's turn our attention to the seeking

We often have to look long and hard, before we find what we need in life. And then you never really know if you will find what you are looking for. A job, or a place to live for ex-

ample. A lot of people are looking for a job. And way too few are finding one. People, who have found jobs have found something important, but they haven't found everything that they need to live or to survive. And even those, who think they have everything still have the feeling they are missing something. What is the most important thing about seeking?

How often am I looking for a helpful solution? How often am I looking for a way to direct the church in? And how vigorously is our civilization seeking advancements in economics, science and technology? And how often do we find that the gap between rich and poor is widening? And that technology is not only bringing solutions but also new problems which we no longer have in our control? It seems that the more we are looking for solutions, the more problems we are creating.

And because of this, God introduces himself as a passionate seeker. God almighty changes himself into a passionate seeker when only one person is in danger of getting lost. We can compare God to a man, who leaves the 99 behind in order to look for the one, that is missing.

Now let's turn our attention to being the one that is lost.

Sometimes it only becomes clear that you are lost, when someone is looking for you. When no one is looking for you and no one has even missed you, then you know that you are truly lost. When life has no meaning. When nothing has any more importance. When just others control who you are and what you do. To me it is a challenging question, how to talk nowadays about "being lost". I am convinced, that everywhere we look people and civilization are lost – and don't even know it. They aren't interested in the fact that God is looking for them. And what do we Christians truly mean, when we proclaim that God is our salvation? "Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me – I once was lost, but now I am found" – does that ring a bell? Is that really our testimony?

No matter who we are, and where we are and how lost we feel: God doesn't give up on us ever. He looks for the lost like the shepherd in our parable. In the evening, as he counts his sheep, he realizes, that one is missing. He then turns his complete attention to finding that one lost sheep. He retraces his steps. He looks to the left and to the right of the path. He stops. He listens. He moves on. And finally he sees and hears his sheep. He carefully approaches it. And then he has it – this silly sheep, that for whatever reason thought it had to go its own way. But now it's found – and full of joy he carries it home on his shoulders.

So the last experience we want to look at is being found

Being found is an experience, which doesn't change the world, but changes that individual's world completely. Being found is exactly the opposite of being lost. Life is full of meaning. It has an importance to you and others. It is more than the sum of your good and bad deeds. Your life has value and worth that God has given it – regardless of your input, regardless of whether you are successful or not, regardless of whether you are rich or poor, old or young, skilled or unskilled.

The joy of finding and being found are obviously the same in heaven as on earth. It is an unusual thought, but it is a thought which Jesus apparently wants us to get used to: Our heavenly father can rejoice like a child, yes like a child that has found what it has been so desperately looking for.

Why does God do this? Why does he turn into a passionate seeker who doesn't give up until he has found, what he is looking for? Why does he invest so much time and energy? Why does he invest so much of himself? Why does he risk becoming a man? Why does he risk being persecuted and nailed to the cross? Why does he do all of this just to find: believers and non-believers, righteous and the unrighteous, the lost and the turned out, ... Why is every single person important to God? Why does he leave the 99 behind and look for the one? A loss of just one percent shouldn't really matter, should it? Why does God risk so much looking for men and women who act as a rule even more stupidly in their relationship to God than sheep do? Perhaps the best answer is one that a child understands. There is a German lullaby. It consists of simple questions and simple answers and expresses a deep truth. And the text is as follows: "Weißt du, wie viel Sternlein stehen an dem blauen Himmelszelt? ... Gott der Herr hat sie gezählet, dass ihm auch nicht eines fehlet..." Loosely translated: Do you know how many stars there are in the sky? – God has counted them to make sure, that they are all there. That not a single one is missing.

That not one single star is missing – That's it, dear congregation. And think: How much more important a human being is than a star? If we discover that we ourselves have been found then it becomes important to us, that no one else should be lost. Then we will seek those, who are lost – those, who try to manage their lives alone, those who are overlooked and forgotten, those, who think they don't need any help, those who think they can manage on their own. And we will also look for brothers and sisters, who once belonged to our congregation. Those who couldn't find a home here at Peace Church Community. We will also turn into seekers – an will seek with patience and love, without pressure and pretence – like the one, who is the true shepherd for all mankind.

Amen.