

Today's Gospel speaks of acceptance and forgiveness. With two incredibly powerful parables, Jesus tells us just how valuable we are to God. Intrinsically, we are of great value to God, simply because we are his. In Christ, of course, we are God's children, or to use the language of the Psalmist, "We are the sheep of his pasture." What happens when we turn away from Christ? What happens to those who do not know Christ? Are the lapsed or the fallen of any less value to God? This is the point of both of the parables in Luke's gospel reading this morning.

Jesus told a story about a shepherd with a hundred sheep. We can paraphrase the first parable this way. "Would you," Jesus asked, "just forget the lost sheep, even if the poor animal's life was in danger from predators? Of course you wouldn't. You would go out and search until you found that lost sheep, because you are a good shepherd." Of course, the analogy breaks down a bit, here. The way Luke told it, the shepherd would abandon the ninety-nine remaining sheep to their own devices while he searched for the lost one. That's a bit risky. I think it's likely that the narrator got the details of the parable a little out of whack, but that doesn't take away from the point. Until the lost sheep wandered off, he was just one of the flock – important to the shepherd, of course, but just one of the flock. But, when he wandered off, he suddenly had the full attention of the shepherd; his intrinsic value became much more focused. The shepherd would do all that he could to find that sheep, at least a good shepherd would.

The same is true about the widow with ten silver coins. Together, they constituted her wealth, but when they were all safe in her storage spot, one coin was no different from the other. When she managed to misplace one of them, the lost coin had her full attention. She stopped everything she was doing to thoroughly search the house, and rejoiced gratefully when she found it.

It's hard to compare ourselves with sheep or coins, at least as they are presented in these parables, because we don't want to think of ourselves as just one more soul in God's eyes, unless we have managed to slide significantly down the scale of righteousness. Of course our value in God's eyes doesn't change. Neither is our value to God based on our righteousness. We are each uniquely valuable to God, because God created us and we are the product of his will; and, because Christ Jesus died for each of us. In God's eyes, if not our own, our value cannot depreciate.

We live in a throwaway society. If something wears out, we just buy a new one. When our car gets a few years old, we trade it in on a new model. If we lose something, we generally replace it. God doesn't do things the way that we do. If we slide from righteousness, God tries to set us right. That's the whole point of Atonement. That's the whole point of Calvary. Setting us right. Redeeming us. Salvaging us from the devil's dump so that we can retain our place in the Kingdom of God.

God is active in the redemption process, not passive. God sent his Son into this world for our salvation, and his victory is our victory. When we sin, the Holy Spirit begins the process of recalling us to righteousness, prompting us, through others, through circumstances to remove the blinders that restrict our vision of what we can and should be in Jesus Christ. When the blinders do come off, we are able to repent and return to the fold. The sheep that was lost is found! The coin that was lost is back in the widow's hand! God rejoices in heaven. *Amen.*