

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
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**Worship Series: *Hard Truth***

**Service Theme: *The Found Are Left; The Lost Are Found***

**Sermon Theme: *More Lost Than You Realize, More Loved Than You Can Imagine* (September 11, 2022)**

**Luke 15:1-10**

Any time I feel like complaining that my ministry is too difficult, I think of Hosea. He makes my problems seem pretty trivial. Because of all God's prophets, Hosea received one of the strangest, most difficult directives. Towards the beginning of Hosea's nearly 4-decade prophetic ministry, God commanded him, ***“Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness.”*** You heard that right. God had Hosea marry a woman named Gomer, who was renowned for her adultery and sexual sin. And together, they raised 2 sons and a daughter, although from the way the Bible phrases it, the 2 youngest probably weren't actually Hosea's.

Yikes, right? But wait, it gets better! Eventually, adulterous Gomer left Hosea for another lover, who conscripted her into slavery and prostitution. That wasn't necessarily shocking, based on her reputation. But it is shocking that after all that, God doesn't tell Hosea to divorce and abandon his unfaithful wife. Rather, God commanded Hosea, ***“Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.”*** And Hosea tells us, ***“So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”***

But why? Why would God command his faithful prophet to marry an unfaithful woman like Gomer? And why would God tell Hosea to buy her out of slavery and love her—even after the lack of love she'd shown to him?

It doesn't seem fair, does it? Imagine how much Hosea must have suffered; how much it must have cost him to love someone so undeserving of his love! But that's exactly why God commanded Hosea to do this. Because he wanted Hosea to prophesy to the people of Israel not just with his words, but with his whole life. God wanted the faithful love that Hosea showed to unfaithful Gomer to be one big visual reminder to God's people of the way that he faithfully loved them, even though they'd been unfaithful to him!

Nearly eight centuries later, Jesus told a series of parables to visually drive home that same message to his audience: You are **More Lost Than You Realize, and More Loved Than You Can Imagine.**

We sometimes call Luke 15 the “Lost” chapter of the Bible, because in it, Jesus tells three straight parables about things that are lost, and then found. We use that word “lost” in reference to something we can't find, or someone who can't find their way to their destination. But we also sometimes say, “He's lost” to describe someone who is hopeless or helpless. In these “lost” parables, Jesus uses the visual of things lost in the first sense, to talk about people lost in the second sense.

If I asked you to picture a “lost” person, who do you see? A drug addict so enslaved by their addiction, no amount of intervention seems to help? An atheist so hardened in their rejection of God, it seems pointless to share your faith with them? A convict, caught in an unending cycle of crime and prison time? Someone whose immoral life choices have taken them so far from God's paths, it seems hopeless they'll ever be found?

Those are certainly the kind of people Jesus' contemporaries would have called “lost,” like the ***“tax collectors and sinners [who] were all gathering around to hear [Jesus].”*** The social outcasts and religious pariahs excluded because of their sinful actions and lifestyles. And Jesus certainly meant sinners like that too when he told these parables about lost sheep and lost coins. But if you think only people like that, whose sins are big, blatant, and public are lost, then you're more lost than you realize. Because you're the sheep! You're the coin! You are Gomer!

No, not you, right? You come to church and Bible study. You bring your kids to Sunday School. You're always giving your time or your offerings to support the church's ministry. You read your Bible, pray, and have family devotions at home during the week. You're an honest, hardworking employee. You're a patient, encouraging parent. You're a faithful, loving spouse. Even if you have flaws, and aren't always perfect, people wouldn't call you "lost," right?

But would they feel that way if every thought in your mind was broadcast on a big screen over your head for everyone to watch? Or if the transcripts of everything you said in private text messages or behind closed doors was handed out for everyone to read? Or if your secret sins known only to you and God were revealed to your spouse, children, employer, or church family, would they turn up their noses at you, like the lost tax collectors and prostitutes of Jesus' day?

And even if everyone else doesn't know, we know. And God knows how far our hearts often are from him. As Scripture reminds us, "***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***" "***Surely I was sinful from the time my mother conceived me.***" "***I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.***" "***There is no one righteous, not even one. All have turned away.***" "***Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***" "***You were dead in your transgressions and sins.***"

On our own, every single person is spiritually lost-- helpless, and hopeless. Even when we do good, don't we often do it for the wrong reasons? Even when we do good, it doesn't take away the bad we've done. Every time we do something God tells us not to do, or fail to do what God tells us to do, we're Gomer!

Because every sin comes from loving something more than we love God. Every sin—whether big public sins or small, private sins—makes us an unfaithful spouse, running off for another lover that will turn us into slaves. Hopelessly and helpless lost and separated from God.

It's absolutely vital to understand that on our own, we are far more lost than we realize. Because if we don't understand that we're Gomer, the

lost sheep, the lost coin, we're the worst kind of lost—lost without realizing you're lost. Because the lost person who doesn't realize it sees no need to be found or rescued.

When I was 2 of 3, my extended family spent the day at the beach. At one point, one of the adults realized that Little Troy was nowhere to be found. Which sparked a huge search and rescue effort from everyone at the beach—searching everywhere to find me. Until a little later, when I came strolling back to my family's beach blanket as if nothing had happened. I had to use the bathroom, so without telling anyone, I had wandered away, used the bathroom and then came back, oblivious that I'd almost given my parents a heart attack. I had no idea I was lost. I also had no idea the danger I'd been in by wandering away!

That's the kind of lostness that caused Jesus to tell these parables in the first place! As "lost" people like tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners gathered around Jesus, "***The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'***" In Jesus' day, sharing a meal with someone wasn't just an act of hospitality. It was an offer of friendship, relationship, and community. And the Pharisees and teachers of the law thought "lost" people like that didn't deserve to be part of the social or religious community.

Why did they feel that way? Because they considered themselves the "found" because of their titles, and outward obedience to the laws of Moses. And so they looked down on everyone else they considered "lost," and treated them as inferior-- not worthy of their time or love. Oblivious to just how lost they were!

Do you ever do that? View groups of people different from you with an "us vs. them" mentality? Consider people so lost, that they're not worth your time, or deserving of your love? Why are we shocked when God tells Hosea to lovingly take Gomer back? Isn't it because we look at an unfaithful woman like Gomer, and think she's too lost to deserve being loved, forgiven, and welcomed back? Then we're more lost than we realize.

We need to realize that we're Gomer—because it makes what God commanded Hosea that much more life-changing. Because unless we admit that we're more lost than we realize, we can't appreciate that we're more loved than you can imagine!

With these two parables, Jesus shows us God's heart. The Good Shepherd asks, ***“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?”*** Jesus' question assumes people will answer, “Of course!” But is that what you'd actually do? I mean, it makes zero business-sense to leave 99 sheep unprotected, and put yourself in danger just for one sheep, who let's face it, got himself into this mess? And once the shepherd finds the sheep, he throws a big party-- all over one sheep? Who would do that? The only reason the shepherd would do all that is if...the shepherd deeply loves every single one of those sheep. If you had 6 kids and one got lost, I hope you wouldn't tell your spouse, “Well, we still have 5 at least. Let's go home.”

Then Jesus takes us into the home of a woman who has 10 silver coins, but loses one. These Greek drachmas were equivalent to one day's wages for a skilled worker. So today, it would be like losing a couple \$100 bills. And what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps out her whole house, and searches every nook and cranny to find that lost coin. The only reason she'd go to all that work is if that money was extremely valuable and important to her. The millionaire probably doesn't lose any sleep over a lost \$200. But if that money is what she needs to live and feed her family, it's so valuable, it's worth every effort to find. And when she finds it, she too throws a party to celebrate!

With these parables, Jesus shows us that you are more loved than you can imagine. Because you're that wandering sheep. You're that roll-away coin! And yet, Jesus loves you so deeply, and finds you so valuable and important, that he relentlessly pursued you, until you were found. It doesn't matter how far you've wandered, or how lost you've become. You're never too lost for Jesus to come after you!

To buy you back from your slavery to sin, he paid far more than 15 shekels of silver and a homer and letheck of barley, the price Hosea paid to redeem unfaithful Gomer. Jesus paid everything—his life, his death, the very blood of the Son of God, so that hopelessly lost people like us could be found. Jesus came and found you through God's Word, or through your Baptism. After taking a cross on his shoulders, your Savior threw you over his shoulders, and carried you into his family by faith. And there was a wild, glorious party in Heaven, as God and the angels rejoiced that one more lost had been found. That's how loved you are—more loved than you can even imagine!

And when you know how lost you really are, and how loved you really are, that completely changes the way we view other people. Instead of viewing those who are lost as inferior or unworthy of our love; instead of viewing them as some enemy that must be conquered, instead we can view them in a way that reflects the heart of a God who relentlessly seeks the lost. As someone worth every effort, worth all our time, and worth any cost to lovingly pursue. Because you know what it's like to be lost—and then to be lovingly pursued until you were found.

When you understand that you're more lost than you realize, and more loved than you can imagine, when we hear God tells Hosea to love Gomer, despite her unfaithfulness, instead of turning up your nose, or saying, “That's not fair!” instead, shed a tear of joy and thanks. Because in that faithful love for the unfaithful, we catch a tiny glimpse of the love that Jesus has for you!