

October 10, 2021

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP



Special Music: "The Lost Sheep" Trent Vineyard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUjpxwN4dfM>

12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?"

13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Matthew 18:12-14

CARRY ME HOME

There are times
That I am so obsessed
With what is coming next
That I forget where I am.
I look around me,
See the flock is gone.
I find I am alone,
No longer home.
No shepherd near
Just pain and fear
The night descending
Into darkness and shadow.

And with the coming day
No hope remains.
My spirit drained.
No one came.
No one speaks my name.
I lay beneath
The searing sun
In misery.
And wait to die.
I want To die.
The day passes

Sun and moon

Then day two
With nothing new.
I do not move
But shed tears upon the grass
Within the sacred narrow pass
Despondent in this place,
Void of redemption.

And then the whistling notes
Traveling on breezes
Sing out in the
All too familiar
Safe places of my mind.
Sun and moon,
Divergent.
Life and death,
Emergent.
In sacred halls
An angel falls
My shepherd calls.
And I rise to listen

Ear to wind,
Spirit ascends
As I spot the presence
And feel the essence
Of my salvation
Silhouetted against the sun

Captured in the glow of the moon

Caution tossed

Aside

In search of what is lost.

I pray

And make my way

To stand before him

Cloaked in guilt

As he lifts me to his shoulders

And carries me home.

There was an old television series that you are probably familiar with. In the 1980s, Tony Shalhoub played Adrian Monk in the USA Network series 'Monk.' It was a most challenging role because the consultant detective Adrian Monk had a plethora of maladies and phobias, including obsessive-compulsive disorder. In one scene from the series, Monk is at a work-out center and is watching a man doing pull-ups. The man was counting each pull-up that he accomplished. "96, 97, 98, 99." And then he stops doing pull-ups, grabs a towel, wipes his face and prepares to leave. This drives Monk crazy. For the next five minutes he encourages, demands, begs, and pleads with the man to do one more pull-up for an even 100. But the man refuses, and Monk is left tortured in his obsessive-compulsive mind feeling left short with an itch he cannot scratch. Just one more. Just one more. Please, just one more.

I like to chase rabbits. Too much. For me, distractions are inevitable, but all too often the distraction overtakes my purpose and changes my priorities making it difficult for me to meet deadlines. I think that some of that is due to my ADD, but not all of it. More likely it is because I love what I do and all the different elements that make up my day. There are times when I feel that I am juggling 100 balls at the same time. But some of those balls are rabbits, meaning I don't really have to juggle them. But if I drop just one of those balls, I have an extremely hard time dealing with it. Just like Monk. I feel incomplete. People tell me to give myself a break. That I am being too hard on myself. Everyone lets things fall through the cracks every once in a while. But for me, it's just not that easy to let go. I want that last pull-up. I want to believe I can juggle all 100 balls. I'm

working on setting priorities knowing that that is a pretty silly way for me to deal with life. Yes, there are things that I have to get done. But there are also things that I just want to get done. Priorities have to be set so that I can meet the many deadlines I face each day.

Sheep are both smart and stupid at the same time. They have an intimate relationship with the shepherd that is pretty amazing. If you were to take 10 herds of sheep and put them in the same pen, let them mix themselves up real good. Then take their shepherds and place them in a large circle around the pen and open the gate with each shepherd calling for their own sheep, every individual sheep will go directly to its shepherd without hesitation. The sheep knows the shepherds voice and can discern it over all the bleating of the other sheep and the voices of the other shepherds. If you were watching that, you would almost mistake the sheep for being intelligent.

However, if you have a herd of sheep in a field near a cliff and one of the sheep sees a nice big patch of green grass below the cliff's edge, without hesitation the sheep will jump to the ledge without giving a thought as to how they are going to get back up. Because we don't understand the shepherd/sheep relationship, when we watch this happen, you might think the shepherd is cruel in the way that he deals with it. The shepherd doesn't climb down to the sheep to bring it back up. That's because the sheep would get extremely angry and start biting and kicking which is dangerous for both the sheep and the shepherd. So, the shepherd leaves the sheep on the ledge until it is too weak from hunger to fight back. At that point the shepherd can retrieve the sheep without any danger

to himself or the animal. Sheep can be very stupid and get themselves into a lot of trouble.

But here's the thing about the Shepherd/sheep relationship. The shepherd never gives up on the sheep, even if the sheep are too stupid to realize it. No matter what ridiculous thing the sheep has done, the shepherd will do anything to try and fix it. It may not be pretty. I may even look cruel. But the shepherd is obsessed with taking care of the sheep and will not leave it lost or in trouble. And there seems to be some assurance because of the relationship when the shepherd leaves to go find a lost sheep, the rest of the sheep seem to know that what the shepherd is doing for that sheep and stay put.

12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?”

Shepherding is not much different today than it was 2000 years ago. The basic elements are still there, even if they do use more modern equipment. Sheep still know their shepherd's voice. Sheep still do stupid things and get themselves in trouble. Shepherds are still obsessive about protecting the sheep.

People are not the same way. In some ways, it isn't our fault. Often, we don't realize that we have a shepherd or anyone else to care about us. We believe that when we do something stupid, that it is the end of the line for us. No one is going to bail us out. Or maybe, we just don't want to tell anyone that we

have managed to get themselves in a pickle, because it could be embarrassing. So, we try to fix things on our own, thinking no one is watching, and we usually fail miserably. Sometimes we are so embarrassed that we will roll around in our pain and not ask for help, or allow anyone else to see the pain.

But a good shepherd knows when their flock is hurting. A good shepherd is aware of when even one sheep in a flock of 100 is struggling. And the shepherd will stop everything else to look after that one sheep. It is the nature of shepherding. It's like Monk. It's an obsession. It's not like the shepherd chooses to help the one sheep or help the flock. It's more like there is no choice. That this is the way things are meant to be. The sheep cannot do anything that will cause the shepherd to ignore it. It's simply not in the temperament of the shepherd to ignore the needs of any of the sheep in the flock.

13 And if he finds that sheep, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

I want to tell you a theological secret. Don't let it freak you out. Listen very carefully because it is extremely important. God is obsessed with us. It goes way beyond love. God will do anything to bring us back to the flock. It doesn't matter what we have done. It doesn't matter what we have said. It doesn't matter if we drew blood. It doesn't matter if we shook our fist and yelled and screamed obscenities at our creator. It doesn't matter that we ran away. Hid in a dark place. Drank ourselves into a stupor. Cursed the name of God and all of creation. Spat on the name of Jesus. None of that matters, because God is

obsessed with us. God will go to the ends of the universe to find us and bring us home. All that God wants is for us to feel safe and know peace, joy, love. God wants to be able to look us in the eye and tell us that everything is going to be okay. God wants to wrap arms around us, keep us warm, make us feel safe and secure. God wants us to know that God will never ignore us or our difficulties. God loves us so much that **“he sent his only begotten son to die for us.”** God is obsessed with us.

Most of us don't realize that. Most of are not even sure that God will come looking for us when we get lost. Most of us feel so guilty, ugly, dirty, and depressed, that we don't want God to find us because of what our Creator might think of us. Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, we just want to hide. We are so busy trying to avoid having that important conversation with God that we fail to realize that having that conversation is the only way we are going to get better.

14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Our creator sends the shepherd to save us. And beyond that salvation is a place of grace most profound. Jesus places our beaten souls on his shoulders and takes us home, back to our flock, back to community, back to fellowship, back to the security of the shepherd and the flock. He never asks us why we did what we did, what distracted us, what caused us to stray from His presence and the safety of His arms. He takes us home, just as we are. Tired, muddy, worn, and guilt-ridden. He tells us we are forgiven and then releases us back into the

loving arms our spiritual family. He is not willing to let us perish in our obstinance and stupidity. He knows that we are stiff-necked lambs, but that is one of the things that endears us to Him.

We are not going to stop being Jesus' flock. He knows us. We know him. He calls and we know His voice. We can relish in the promise that Jesus will drop everything to come bring us home. It is the way things are between the shepherd and the sheep. The question is, are we willing to let Him to that?

AMEN

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