



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE



September 8, 2022

SEASON OF PENTECOST

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 36

UCJCI 42nd SYNOD THEME – Rooted, Resilient: Responding in HOPE (Health, Opportunity, Peace, Evangelism)



**Queen Elizabeth II
1926 - 2022**

The Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, expresses deep sorrow at the passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. We recall that the Government of the Cayman Islands held the Platinum Jubilee Service at the Elmslie Memorial Church on Sunday, June 5, 2022, under the theme 'Spirit to Serve'. Truly, Her Majesty's life was one of dedicated service to her people, the realms, the Commonwealth, and the world. Our prayers are with her family and all who mourn her passing.

May her soul rest in peace and light perpetual shine upon her

(photo: Pinterest)



Rescued by God's grace and mercy

*By Rev. Rohan Forrester
(Chair of Council – CIRMC)*

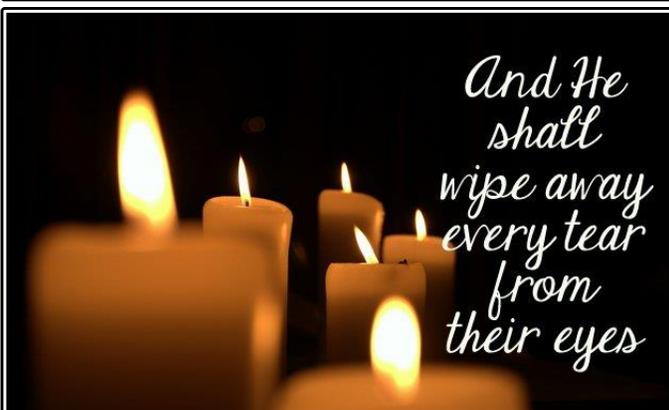
Please read Luke 15:1-10

The month of September in the Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council is a time for remembering, renewing of our commitment to Christ and celebrating our mission in these islands. The Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council of the United Church in Jamaica and The Cayman Islands celebrates on September 11, 176 years of unbroken mission and partnership that led to the establishment and expansion of the church in the Cayman Islands. It all started in 1845 when the Presbyterian Church of Jamaica decided to send Missionaries to preach the Gospel in Africa. It was also in 1845 when the missionaries set out for Calabar in Nigeria, they did not get beyond the Cayman Islands as their ship was wrecked on the reef at East End and thereby noticed the spiritual situation among the locals. However, early in the spring of 1846, Rev. William Niven, a Scottish Presbyterian Missionary who was at the time serving in Jamaica, also passed through Grand Cayman while on his way to England and observed the situation firsthand. Later in July 1846 on his return from England Rev. Niven placed the matter before the Presbytery of Jamaica for consideration. A decision was then made at the Synod meeting at Goshen in St. Mary, Jamaica, that someone should go to the Cayman Islands.

The joint objectives were the development of Christianity and education in the Cayman Islands while souls are won for the Kingdom of God. The Rev. James Elmslie heard of the plight of the Caymanians and answered the call to serve with these words, **"If no one go, I will go."** It wasn't until **September 11, 1846**, The Rev. James Elmslie at age 50 set foot ashore on Grand Cayman with his family and the rest is history.

Rev. Elmslie understood clearly that God's mission is to the entire world to invite people to experience God's grace and mercy; to share the undeserved blessings while reminding everyone that God has shown mercy by withholding the punishment that is justly deserved.

The beginning of the mission to the Cayman Islands can be viewed as a rescue plan, but who or what to be rescued? The answers to these two questions can be found in the Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin



in today's reading from Luke 15: 1-10. However, for this discourse, more emphasis will be placed on the Parable of the Lost Sheep.

The parables describe for us God's actions and attitudes when God is confronted with something that is lost. Jesus used two different metaphors to highlight the kind of relationship God desires to have with God's people and how this attitude must be reciprocated among us. In essence, the parables describe for us:

- God's response when people are living in sin and lost; living their lives away from God.
- God's first response to the lost: God's first response is not one of anger or frustration but searching and saving.
- God's reaction when God finds what is lost, God doesn't feel resentment, but real joy.
- God's price tag on the lost. Jesus' mission is to seek and to save came at great personal cost, culminating at the cross.

As we delve further into the text, we meet two types of unpopular people in first century Palestine in the first verse of our reading. We're told that "tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus." Tax collectors were unpopular, because they collaborated with the Roman occupiers to collect revenue for the Empire, and because they often creamed off some extra money for themselves. Those tax collectors were wealthy and well-connected with the government, but that didn't stop them being unpopular.

The other unpopular group is 'sinners'. Sinners was a more general term used to describe anyone who didn't live according to the Jewish law. Some lived obviously immoral lives, while others were simply ritually unclean, because of what they ate or wore. For the Pharisee, a 'sinner' was an immoral person, a deliberate Lawbreaker or someone involved in one of a number of trades, including herding sheep. It's fair to say that these 'sinners' were not members of high society – on the contrary they were at its margins. But whatever their faults, these two unpopular groups of people were doing something rather wonderful. They were listening to Jesus. They were gathering around Jesus to listen to what he had to say. They were obeying an instruction that Jesus had just given in the last verse of the previous chapter. Jesus said, "whoever had ears to hear, let them hear." And these tax collectors and sinners were wisely doing just that. Whatever their faults, those tax collectors and sinners were spot on when they gathered around Jesus to hear God's word. The same principle applies to us today, whoever we are. Whether we are wealthy and well-connected, or poor and a social outcast, Jesus calls us to gather around and listen to his words. That's one reason why we should gather together weekly, as the Bible is read and taught to us or share in our home groups.

Sadly, not everyone was listening to what Jesus had to say. Some people present had their ears closed and their mouths open. They muttered and grumbled: The mutterers and grumblers are identified in verse 2 as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. These self-righteous, outwardly religious men were within earshot of Jesus, and all they could do was grumble. They were so busy muttering to one another that they missed out on hearing words spoken by Jesus. So, Jesus said to them, don't grumble! (v.1-2).

What's behind the Pharisees grumbling was a misunderstanding about Jesus and his motive. The Pharisees had failed to understand who Jesus was and why he had come. You see, their complaint against Jesus was that 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' The Pharisees thought that a true man of God would keep far away from tax collectors

and sinners. They thought a true Messiah would make it his business to keep apart from those considered spiritually sick and morally unclean. They thought that only a sinner would seek out the company of other sinners. Jesus is accused by the Pharisees and scribes of inappropriate conduct.

Of course, they could not have been more wrong. Jesus had previously defended himself against similar accusations by describing himself as a doctor. A doctor visits the sick, not the healthy. Jesus said he had come to heal the spiritually sick, not the healthy. The truth is every society has unpopular people. People who are looked down on for one reason or another. People who are despised, disliked or merely made fun of. Tabloid newspapers, for example, often tell us we should look down on certain politicians or celebrities, as well as those who have erred in their ways and are incarcerated.

Note that the Pharisee's problem with Jesus was: "Why are the dregs of society and irreligious people attracted to you and you are welcoming them?" The flawed thinking of the Pharisees was: Unholy people are not attracted to people who are truly holy. And holy people do not engage socially with unholy people. Jesus then cannot be holy. He must be a false prophet. Therefore, the reason for this parable must be a singular one: Jesus wanted to explain to His critics why "the dregs of society," "the riffraff of society" and the irreligious were attracted to Him and welcomed by him. Even so, Jesus wanted to explain to His critics why "the dregs of society," "the riffraff of society" and the irreligious were of great value to him.

Jesus challenges the mindset and attitude of the 'righteous' toward the 'unrighteous', the 'Christian' toward the 'unbeliever', the 'disciple' toward the 'unlearned' to make the point about a shepherd and his sheep and the woman and her coins. These parables are messages and stories Jesus told to teach us spiritual truths. They are told not simply for our entertainment, but for our faith and relationship with Christ and one another.

Jesus' request of the Pharisees to "suppose they were shepherds" was a shock to their feelings and an insult to their intelligence. Anyone who believed shepherds were unclean was sure to be offended if addressed as one. However, Jesus was speaking in the context of the shepherd mimicking the work of the Great Shepherd. The word Pharisee means 'separated one'. They were separatists who taught that salvation comes through separation. Therefore, Jesus' behavior shamed them when he said, "suppose they were shepherds." A closer look at the parables reveals five things to apply to our daily lives:

The Culture

The parables strike at the heart of our culture and value system and confronts us with the magnitude of God's infinite mercy, forgiveness and love. Our culture often determine how the lost is treated. Our actions are in some ways contradictory to spiritual teaching of Jesus. This is a cultural reality.

The word lost had many meanings to first century shepherds including: Separated from the flock and unable to reconnect without help. Lost also means to be disconnected from God. Lost is a temporary state although a serious one because the lost person could be found. To be found is equated to the genuine repentance [change of heart] of the lost person. This is an abandonment of sin in order to be brought into a relationship with God. As far as some people are concerned, losing only one sheep out of a hundred is not so bad. You might even say it's remarkable. Culturally, what's the big deal? You have lost only one out of a hundred.

Be thankful for what you have and do not worry about what you do not have. That is a cultural reality persons will consider. On the contrary, the one is as valuable as the ninety and nine. With God, every sheep counts!

When the sheep was no longer under the shepherd's watchful eye, injured and unable to reunite with the shepherd or the flock must be sought. Often times the lost sheep was unaware of its lost state. It may be grazing or lying still in unfamiliar places. The lost sheep is susceptible to predators or thieves. A stray sheep usually lies down helplessly, and will not move, stand up or run. It becomes immobile.

Jesus attached a spiritual meaning to the word lost in Luke 15:7 – "I tell you that in the same way there will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

The truth is,

- Our church values those who are lost or have been missing from church for some time.
- Our church values any missing young adults, youth or children who have not been to church for quite some time. We value them because they represent a large part of the future of the mission of the church.

The truth is missing, or lost people can be found! Let's not lose sight of this fact. God values missing or lost souls even more than we value missing or lost people! Lost people are lost for different reason.

- Some are lost due to fear.
- Some are lost due to hurt, injury and pain.
- Some are lost due to an incorrect concept of the church and God.
- Some are lost because they don't want to give up the relationship they have for a relationship with Christ.

The common denominator among lost people is that they need our help to be found. It was Dr. Ravi Zacharias who said, "We have to find the back door to peoples' hearts because the front door is heavily guarded." This speaks to the strategy to search and find those who are lost or reach people for Christ. How should the church search for the lost?

1. Be intentional.
2. Go where lost sheep go – to the church (yes, some are part of the church, but lost), their homes, at the workplace, at school, in the bars, barber shops, beauty salon, their favorite hang-out spots in the community.

The church is interested in the lost.

The Concern

Showing concern for the lost is at the center of Jesus' message to us. In the parables, we are taught to have concern for the lost by demonstrating the passion to find the lost and compassion to welcome them when they're found. We must have the Good Shepherd's heart and show concern for the lost sheep, in the same way we do when something of great value is lost. Three times the word lost appears in these 7 verses. Jesus places emphasis on finding the lost. Jesus asks us to place ourselves in the shoe of the shepherd in the parable in order to fully embrace the moral lesson he wants us to learn. Since the common denominator among lost people is that they need our help to be found, let us take a moment to think about sheep who are compared to people:

- Sheep are pretty stupid.
- They easily wander off, get themselves into trouble,
- Their physical appearance doesn't exactly strike fear into the heart. I expect few of us would like to be thought of as a sheep –

we would much rather be thought of as wise old owls, strong lions or a soaring eagle.

The Bible consistently and clearly compares human beings to sheep.

- Human beings are sheep in need of a Savior.
- Human beings are prone to wander from God and do (frankly) stupid, sinful things.
- We are prone to get lost – to lose contact with our Creator and harm ourselves and other people by not living God's way.

In contrast, what a wonderful shepherd is described in our parable! Think about how well the shepherd responds when his sheep wanders off:

For a start, he takes initiative – the shepherd goes out to seek the lost sheep, leaving the 99 behind. He doesn't sit back and wait for it to find its own way home. He knows the sheep desperately needs a Savior. Secondly, the shepherd shows great perseverance – he keeps going until he's found his sheep, he doesn't slack off. Thirdly, the Shepherd saves his sheep at some personal cost. He sacrifices his time, security, and energy to find it and carry it back home. This should be the concern of every Christian to the unbeliever or someone who has strayed.

The Care

God's care for the lost is demonstrated in the shepherd's urgency and determination to find the sheep. So often, we give up too easily when searching for the lost. When others fall through the cracks, some of us are quick to write them off. Not so in the Kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is like a good shepherd who has a flock of a hundred sheep who, losing just one of them, will leave the others and go after the one that is lost until he finds it and brings it back to the fold.

With God, no one is left out or left behind. With God, we live in community with each other, so that to talk about being lost is really to talk about being separated from each other. In other words, the sheep was lost because it was part of the flock to begin with. The very fact that it belonged to the flock led to the fact that, when the shepherd counted heads, it was obvious one was missing.

Sometimes when the lost returns, they are remembered by their past mistakes and endured a period of loneliness, because no one readily befriends them on their return. The Good News is the good shepherd comes looking for the lost, and he searches until he finds them, and, when he does, he brings them back to the fold and care for them like the ninety and nine. That is a model we'd do well to follow in the life of this church – not only to be contented with those who show up on Sunday morning, but to be persistent about reaching out with care to those who don't. Show you care!

The Connection

Being lost has to do with our connection to each other. We're interrelated. We are connected to things that are valuable to us and people around us. So, for us to talk about one who is lost or something of significant value lost is, at the same time, to talk about the effect one who is lost has on the others. Like the man who said, in the wake of his wife's death, "It's not only that I've lost her, but that I'm lost without her."

This is a correlation the church must accept and come to appreciate more and more as recipient of God's grace and mercy: The more intimately we're connected to another person, the more we agonize when we're separated; the less we're connected, the less we're affected. We should always remember the pictures of missing children and adults on the television screen while they evoked sadness, I doubt that they caused us to lose much sleep. If it were our loved one, now, that's another story?

You see, sheep tend to nibble themselves lost – they graze from one tuft of grass to the next all day long with their heads down and, when they look up, they don't know where they are or how they got there, and they certainly don't know how to get back to the flock. It is not that they're particularly stubborn or rebellious or stupid, it's simply their nature: Sheep stray and, when they do, they get lost.

In the Kingdom of God, we are a family – brothers and sisters in Christ, joined by our common allegiance to Christ. We are siblings in Christ because we belong to the Body of Christ, when only one is missing, something about us is missing, as well. The little boy got it right when he said to his Sunday School teacher: “You can't go on with the service until the last sheep is found and brought back to the fold.” The kingdom of God is not complete until everyone is safe and secure and accounted for.

The Celebration

Finding a single lost sheep or something of great value is cause for celebration and feelings of joy to the heart of the shepherd or seeker. The word, celebrate means to rejoice together; to share in another's joy; to congratulate. The shepherd makes the call for his neighbors to share in his joy. The parable ends in part in this way:

When he (the shepherd) has found it (the lost sheep), he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" (vv. 5-6)

To be honest, this is not the way we would like for this parable to end. We'd rather for Jesus to say,

"When he (the shepherd) has found it (the lost sheep), he carries it on his shoulders... When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Well, it's about time... I hope you learned your lesson... You can come back this time, but it would better not happen again.'"

That's not the way the parable ends, is it? The way Jesus told the parable, the shepherd and all of his friends and neighbors rejoiced. In fact, Jesus goes on to say,

"I tell you that even so there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance." (v. 7)

God is the Shepherd and God wants us to be God's sheep. The metaphors illustrate God's care and regard for us as communal beings. The parable of the lost sheep teaches that even when one person is missing from God's family it's extremely important to God. So, let us seek the lost and bring them to repentance that they too may live as recipients of God's grace and mercy.

Infant Blessing

On September 4, 2022, three infants were blessed at the Webster Memorial Church, Bodden Town. May they be blessed with love and peace, surrounded by their family. May their family's example and Gods' enduring love guide them to a life of faith and devotion.



Men's Fellowship Breakfast

SAVE THE DATE

October 29, 2022

at 8 :30 AM

John Gray Memorial United Church Hall
West Bay

Guest Speaker: Rt. Rev. Gary Harriott

Caribbean Breakfast
Ackee, codfish, callaloo,
Boiled bananas, dumplings
Cost \$15.00
A Father Son / Mentee Event

United Church Men's Fellowship

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 11 (Sunday) 14th Sunday after Pentecost

September 17

Girls' Brigade AGM – 9:00 am – Council Office

YLNE Meeting – 1:00 pm – Council Office



on Radio Cayman 89.9
every Sunday at 7:45 am

September 11, 2022
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