

## ***Sermon***

### ***Rejoicing in the Presence of Angels***

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A sheep when lost from its herd becomes paralyzed. The shepherd must go find the sheep that has wandered into the woods and not just lead him back to the flock but carry the sheep because they have become so overwhelmed with fear that they cannot move. At times in our lives we are all like that sheep. Something has happened or we've just walked down the wrong road, and we are paralyzed within this chaos, confusion, addiction, fringe that we found ourselves in. In our scripture today Jesus is sitting with all those lost sheep. But their paralysis has ended, they know Jesus has healing power, they want to become part of the herd again. So Jesus sits down with "them" the tax collectors and sinners, typically that means anyone who within normal society lives on the fringe. Someone with an extreme addiction and sickness, someone who is homeless, someone who perhaps has broken the law, someone who has just fallen away from what we consider an upstanding life. The crowds are pressing in around Jesus to hear his teachings. The Pharisees and Sadducees are present to keep tabs on Jesus and his radical teachings and the people who did not really belong anywhere because they have lived so much of life on those fringes. And the side conversations begin --who invited them? Does he not know who they are, what they do for a living? Who is this Jesus? He talks of godly things on the one hand and yet he eats with them on the other. And here Jesus brings in the parable of the lost sheep and he says rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep.

What Jesus knows and the Pharisees do not, is that without us all we are incomplete. And that holds true for us today as well. When you are not here I wonder where you are, if you're ok, if you are stuck in some wilderness. So do your brothers and sisters in Christ they wonder where you are. Covid threw us all for a loop, lots of changes to our world, our lifestyles but we know we need you for our community to be whole.

What Jesus doesn't do is he doesn't care about what kept them away, what caused the trouble the people with him might be in. He is glad to have them back.

Woven in with the nature of God is the nature of the one who is lost. A lost sheep that is able to bleat out in distress often will not do so, out of fear. Instead it will curl up and lie down in the wild brush, hiding from predators. It is so fearful in its seclusion that it cannot help in its own rescue. The sheep is immobilized, so the shepherd must bear its full weight to bring it home.

When we wander too far and we're stuck in that wilderness like that sheep that becomes paralyzed we forget who our shepherd is. In our Old Testament reading from Exodus that is what has happened to the Israelites. "They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They've bowed down to it and sacrificed to it in a said these are your gods Israel who brought you up out of Egypt." We find other more tangible things

to gravitate to. Drugs, alcohol, pills, food...The Israelites lean on Moses and think Moses is the one who led them out of slavery out of their exile and when things get rough in the desert, they blame him. Rather than seeing that they have been brought out of slavery they only see that they were brought out of one frightening place and into a new frightening place. Fear is short-circuited the peoples senses. Yes they were awestruck by the rumble of gods voice and mountain. But it seems in today's text that they have spent too long festering in their fears. Dwelling in fear causes the people to lose touch with their bodies. Losing touch with their embodied reality causes them to lose touch with their God. But this is not to take light of their predicament. The Israelites were in trouble -- they were dying of thirst in a desert. Being in the throws of addiction, starving spiritually is serious stuff. These fears are not unfounded. The lost sheep are suffering and the fear that that invokes is what keeps them in the wilderness. When fear becomes overwhelming we cannot sense our savior in our lives. We cannot remember the good that God has done for us in those moments. Being part of a community of faith can prevent those really dark moments from imprisoning us in our fears in our wilderness. It is the nature of God to find the one who is lost and it is a nature of a faith community like this to find our sheep. So if you feel lost, if you feel called back, we are just waiting and saving a seat for you here in a seat for you at this table always.

When one in our community goes missing, we are all affected. When one is restored, we are all better off for it. "Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of angels." That is how it is in the household of God.