

# **Sermon on Wednesday 4 November 2020**

## **By Rev. Bill Church**

*Readings: Luke 15. 1-7; Philippians 2. 12-18*

I will try not to say anything about Covid, or the American election or even about my garden or what a bright sunny day it is today.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is one of Luke's great contributions to our understanding of Jesus' teaching, and has inspired much Christian poetry and art (including a rather uninspiring window in the south aisle at St Andrew's).

Like many of Jesus' parables, it is many layered. Jesus tells the story as it were from the outside; we are onlookers, learning from watching the actions of the shepherd and learning something about God's mercy and his unreasonably generous love.

But you could look at it from the point of view of the sheep.

Sir Henry Baker's hymn 'The God of love my shepherd is' is headlined as a version of Psalm 23, but it also incorporates this parable:

"Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love he sought me,

And on his shoulders gently laid,  
And home rejoicing brought me.”

It is very comforting for us to be assured that however perverse and foolish we have been, God will still seek us and bring us home, rejoicing not condemning.

Or, look at the parable from the point of view of the shepherd.

He has spent all day guiding the flock to feed and water, keeping them together and out of harm's way. Late in the day he counts them. One is missing. If I was the shepherd, I would be very annoyed – I would be looking forward to shutting them in for the night and going home and having my supper.

I would probably not have bothered. After all, the other 99 are OK, and the lost sheep may come back of its own accord, or be safely in the next-door sheepfold, or already dead. But, no, the shepherd in the parable goes off in search of the lost sheep.

This is a risk. The shepherd is taking the risk...

- of leaving the other 99 better disciplined sheep unguarded.

- of wasting time.

- of being attacked by wild beasts who have already mauled his sheep.

-of a perilous climb if he finds the sheep halfway down a cliff.

-of being beaten up by rustlers who have stolen his sheep.

But the shepherd still takes those risks. Jesus is saying God takes risks.

So, should human pastors also take risks to search for the few lost, while the many are faithfully following Paul's exhortation to the Philippians? The risk of neglecting the many who have stayed in the fold? The risk that the many will resent the attention given to the stray? The risk of wasting time on a lost cause? The risk of retaliation from exploiters who have got their claws into the lost?

Those are real risks, but the parable suggests they should be taken.