

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 14th September 2025 – Pentecost 14

Readings: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28
1 Timothy 1:1-2, 12-19a

Psalm 14
Luke 15:1-10

I wonder where you were on the 11th September 2001? I wonder what you were doing, and who you were with, when you heard about the airplane attacks in New York and in other parts of the US. In those attacks two thousand, nine hundred and ninety-six people were killed, and six thousand others were injured.

I was an Associate Priest in the Parish of Lismore at that time, and my brother called from England very early in morning asking in a shaky voice if we'd heard what had happened. We switched on the TV, and every channel had graphic images of the World Trade Centre towers falling. I will never forget it, and I think this will be true for many of you.

In some ways the attacks were a turning point in modern history that left millions of people feeling lost and fearful about the future. Today there are ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Russia, Gaza, Israel, and Sudan which create anxiety and fear about the future. How can our faith sustain us when we are anxious and afraid? and, what insight and reassurance can we find in the Scriptures?

As Christians we believe that God calls us to love and forgive. That we are called to trust in the belief that God is always with us, and that with God new life and justice can be possible. Jesus is the one who repeatedly affirmed such understandings and in many ways he is the primary focus in our journey of faith. That said I think sometimes we domesticate our understanding of Jesus and skip over the hardest parts of his journey: his betrayal, crucifixion, and death – preferring to go instead to the joy of resurrection!

We can also be tempted to forget, or minimise, the antagonism he experienced from his own religious authorities, and focus instead on our favourite miracle, our favourite parable, or our favourite encounter!

But, it's important to remember that Jesus shared with us the tough stuff of being human, as well as the wonderful elements. He was doubted and mocked by religious people who were narrow minded and jealous; he caused angst to his family, and he grieved the loss of a close friend; he was tempted to do the wrong thing; and he was repeatedly misunderstood by those closest to him.

Yet he kept the faith! He kept loving and bringing new life to people who were looked down on by the society of his time; people who his faith community had written off.

The Gospel of Luke today gives an insight into that dissonance between Jesus and the religious authorities for it describes the Pharisees and Scribes grumbling about him spending time with tax collectors and sinners! In response Jesus told them two parables: he suggested that God was like a shepherd who had one hundred sheep, and a woman who had lost a silver coin.

The shepherd reference needs a bit of unpacking because many sheep farming properties across Western Queensland have thousands of sheep. Consequently, it would be impossible for them to know if only one sheep was missing! However, Jesus was talking to people familiar with farming small flocks where a shepherd would know when a single sheep or lamb was absent.

Jesus said that God is like a shepherd, in that Middle Eastern context, who would leave ninety-nine sheep grazing safely to search for the one that had gone missing. Further, that God is happy when a 'lost sheep' is found, and that he carries it back to the others.

In case his listeners had not got the point Jesus continued by suggesting that God is like a woman who had lost one of ten silver coins. She would not rest until the house was swept and the coin found.

Ten silver coins clearly had great significance for a Jewish woman in that time, and we need to understand this to appreciate her sense of loss if one went missing. As I understand it a silver coin was the equivalent to a day's wage, but ten silver coins together could be worn by a woman as her dowry. So, losing one of those coins would have been very significant. Perhaps, it's like a woman in our time losing her wedding ring and searching everywhere – everywhere - until it is found?

Like the shepherd, Jesus suggested that the woman was so happy that the missing coin was found she called together her friends and celebrated with them.

These parables infer that God is loving and searches us out no matter where we get to, or what we've done. The first verse in Psalm 139 last week spoke powerfully about this for it says, *"You search me out, and you know me..."* and, that is good news if we're feeling lost, un-loveable, or beyond hope.

The lost sheep parable also offers us the image of God carrying us back to community, and that is good news when we feel overwhelmed, unworthy, or useless. God can carry us back to community... or, even into community for the first time!

But, what if we're currently feeling OK with life? What if we feel in tune and at peace with God, and with the people we share our lives with? Surely then we're like the ninety-nine sheep of the parable... the ninety-nine who were grazing safely?

However, we are not sheep! We are people made in the image of God, who follow Jesus as disciples – people who are lifelong learners. In our discipleship we seek to be like him so in some ways could consider ourselves to be both sheep and 'apprentice shepherds'!

There are people in our congregation, our local community, our society, and in other parts of the world who feel lost and abandoned. People who long to be in loving relationship with God; and long to be known and loved by someone else.

As we acknowledge this there is the challenge for each of us in some way to make a difference for good. There is an opportunity for us to not only know the blessing of God but also, in God's grace, be a blessing in the lives of others.

As we bear in mind the ongoing need for peace and justice and the ongoing need for compassion and wisdom... may we draw strength and peace from God. The God who calls us, somehow, to be 'shepherds' who seek out the lost – with all the creativity, generosity, and compassion we are capable of.

Worth praying about I reckon. So, let us pray now:

"Loving Shepherd, thank you for carrying us when we feel unable to keep going. Thank you for calling us into relationships where we are known and loved. Secure in these things, give us the grace to be a blessing in the life of someone else. We pray in the name of the one who calls us to follow, Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen**"