

A Theology of Joy

Luke 15:1-10

No doubt you're wondering what a man in a banana suit has got to do with lost sheep?

Well, not much, really. I just wanted to look ridiculous . . . and perhaps make you smile . . . and perhaps get you to think a bit differently about God. Because that's what I think Jesus is doing by telling these two stories . . . a lost sheep and a lost coin.

Sometimes believers in God don't paint the full picture of God. We give the impression that God is most interested in us following the rules, getting things right, living a certain way, being a good person. We give the impression that God is keeping count, watching our every move. Tut-tutting at our indiscretions. *Or*, we give the impression that God isn't really interested in us at all. And, it's not that following the rules is bad . . . or being a good person is wrong . . . it's just that those things don't get us anywhere near the heart of God . . . they don't get us anywhere near knowing what makes God tick . . . that don't get us anywhere near knowing who God is.

That's where the banana comes in. Because if you smiled at the banana suit then I think you're getting close to knowing who God is. And, if you listened to those two stories Jesus told then I think you're getting even closer.

You've got a hundred sheep and one goes missing. Do you leave the ninety-nine sheep to fend for themselves in the wilderness while you go off searching for that one sheep? Of course not! It makes no economic sense. Why risk your whole flock for the sake of one sheep? But, the bloke in the story is obviously not a business man, or an economist because he goes off looking for that one lost sheep! But, now it gets even more bizarre. When he finds that one sheep he carries it back and gathers his friends and neighbours together and throws a party . . . for one sheep! "Rejoice with me! Rejoice!" And I'm sure his joy is infectious . . . who doesn't like a party?

And, in that story we get a little glimpse of what makes God tick . . . a little glimpse of what gets God out of bed in the morning. At the very heart of God is joy. Over-the-top joy, even. God rejoices in the relationship he has with you and me. God rejoices even more when you come into a relationship with him. And, did you notice that when the shepherd found the sheep he didn't say, "You naughty sheep, if you do that again I'll turn you into chops"! No, the shepherd carries the sheep home laughing and celebrating with joy! With joy!

Then, what about the story of the woman with the ten coins. It seems at first that each of those coins must be pretty valuable to her. She searches and searches until she finds the one that is lost. Fair enough, right? But, then, she throws a party too! For finding a coin?! Now, that's ridiculous! She probably spends more on food and drink celebrating with the neighbours than she had in the first place! She is also obviously not an economist. But, she is obviously someone who likes to celebrate. Someone who finds joy even in the little things.

Is this too a little glimpse into the heart of God? God is not a penny-pincher, counting every single thing we do wrong, guarding every single ounce of life to make sure it gets used properly? No, that's not

God. God is someone who finds joy in the smallest things. God is someone who will grab any excuse to celebrate . . . to celebrate life . . . to celebrate *your* life. Most of all to celebrate life together with him.

That's what's at the very heart of God. It's a heart that sings with joy when we are close to him and a heart that aches with pain when we are not.

Perhaps you've even had experience of God's heart . . . if you have ever had a child go missing, say at the show or in the shopping centre. You know that feeling. I experienced that when my youngest was just a toddler. He's nineteen now. But, when he was a toddler he was a runner . . . always trying to escape. We were home one day and it dawned on me that the house was strangely quiet . . . too quiet! Too quiet for a house that was supposed to have a toddler in it! Already my chest was tightening . . . a quick head count . . . one . . . two . . . but no third child! Trying not to panic yet . . . check the rooms . . . no toddler . . . "Have you seen Samuel?" I frantically asked my wife. "I thought he was with you" . . . now there were two of us running around . . . the fear rising . . . heart-rate racing . . . where could he be? . . . and it feels like heavy weights are pushing on your heart . . . and, then, I look out the front window of our two story house . . . and there he is . . . wandering down the middle of the normally-busy road! I don't think I've ever moved as fast as I did that day . . . down the stairs . . . racing to him . . . scooping him up in my arms . . . holding him close . . . holding him tight . . . with tears of relief . . . with tears of joy!

Do you know that feeling? That's the heart of God.

That's the heart of God.

Amen

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Pentecost 14, 2025 (School service)