

23 August 2020
Christ Church, New Southgate
& Friern Barnet

Rev. Ruth Moriarty

Sermon: *God seeks the lost*
Luke 15.1-7

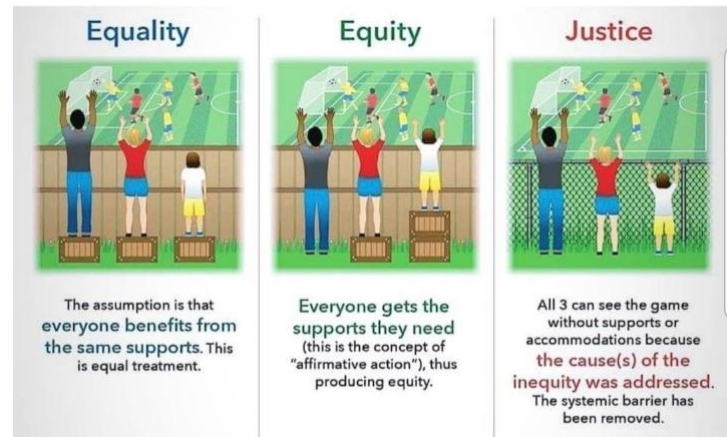
If you had a 100 sheep and 1 wandered off, would you risk losing the 99 for the 1? Do the maths, 99 sheep are better than 1. So why does Jesus say leave the 99 and go for the 1? Why does the shepherd seek the lost? In fact, why is the shepherd so determined to find that lost sheep and does not rest until it is found? Why?

Being lost is horrible. A lost sheep is alone, vulnerable, weak, possibly trapped, out of touch with other sheep and at real risk of being a hungry wolf's tea. A lost sheep is scared, and nervous, it might have even stopped bleating because it is too tired.

But being the shepherd who lost the sheep is far worse. For every friend lost on a night out, for every child lost in a supermarket, for every minister missing someone from their church there is a dull aching void in the stomach of the good friend, the parent, the minister, the shepherd. See the sheep all belong to the shepherd. He's wealthy – he's got a 100. He knows his flock so well as he's reared them from birth. He knows when one is missing and it is all he can think about and it's what drives him to seek and seek and seek and keep on looking for the lost sheep.

This story is often called the lost sheep parable. But this parable isn't about the sheep getting lost, it's about the person who owns the sheep looking for the lost one. Not giving up till he's found it. It's about a shepherd who risks it all for 1, a shepherd who hears the bleating of a lost sheep and cannot rest until they are restored to him. Do you know that your heavenly father God is just like that shepherd? God's heart is for you, for each of us who are lost, stuck, trapped and cut off from the flock for whatever reason. If you feel lost today, please be assured that God is seeking you and yearns to be connected with you.
God seeks the lost.

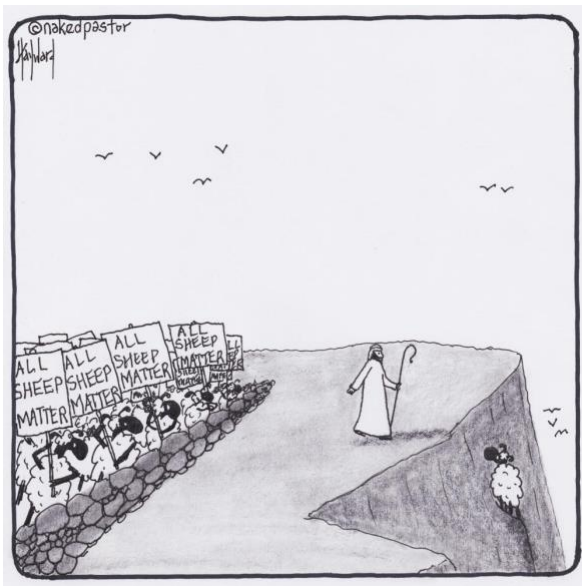
Lately we have been talking about the Black Lives Matter campaign and what justice might mean.



See here an image of 3 people trying to watch a football match over a solid fence, one is tall, the second middle sized and the last one small. When each are given the same box to stand on the tall one can see very well, the middle sized one less so and the small one not at all. Equal treatment doesn't help the different sized people. In the second image the small person gets the biggest box and can see, the middle-sized person a middle-sized box and the tall one nothing. All can see the match an equitable solution. In the third picture the fence is changed to a see-through barrier, everyone can see because the cause of inequity has been removed. This is justice. The shepherd did not treat all his sheep the same, the 99 were left on their own. 1 got special treatment and even a piggyback home. Justice seems unfair to the 99 but restores the 1.

As the shepherd lifts the sheep onto his shoulders, we see the tenderness of God. The God who seeks the lost because he loves them, and treats them differently because he does. The 99 are fine as they are, some might be scared but for the most part they are fine. But the one needs help, needs special attention, needs a different approach and cannot be missed. The shepherd does not rest until he finds the 1.

In this cartoon image - the shepherd is looking for the lost sheep while the 99 sheep hold up placards saying 'all sheep matter'. This drawing explains part



of the reason why black lives matter is important to the church: God cares about the 1 lost sheep. God cares about the one who is vulnerable, alone, and apart from the others, the one that cannot find its way back to the others, the one who is stuck and cannot get home. Justice for the one, is to pick him up and carry him. If the church is serious about following God, this is the God we follow – the God who seeks the lost and cares for them. This is the justice God offers.

The good news about the shepherd is that he also knows how to party – for as much as he is consumed about finding the lost, once found he celebrates. He starts a street party and throws down a feast. The kind of God we have is the looking, finding and partying type of God. This is the kind of God who is good news! For there is joy in the kingdom when the lost are found. God seeks the lost. Christ is seeking each of us now that are lost. He seeks because he loves us, he picks us up because he wants to restore us and carries us when we need it. May each of us delight to follow the Good Shepherd today and celebrate with him a justice that lifts up the lost with joy. Amen.