

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 16 (Proper 19)
Text: Luke 15: 1-10
Theme: "Deluded Lost Sheep"

We all hear the stories of the person who went to a yard sale and picked up an original Picasso for fifty cents, but the far more common story is the person who has delusions about the value of their garbage. I have never been a fan of buying garbage that you don't want in your garage anymore to put in my garage for a while, but occasionally I see a yard sale and I cannot resist. Once I was looking at an old beat up wooden table and thinking that I might be able to use it for the boys as a project table. I asked, "How much for the table?"

"Oh," I was told, "that is the original table out of my Aunt Susie's farmhouse. It's quite a nice antique, but we're only asking \$200 for it." Well then, if it's "quite a nice antique," why's it out in your garage? I didn't check back, but my guess is that either Aunt Susie's antique farmhouse table came down in price considerably, or it's still living in that garage.

We often have inflated ideas about the worth of our stuff, but when all is said and done, usually, aside for the few rare collectors pieces one might have, it's just stuff and not

particularly valuable to anyone but us. It is also common for human beings to have delusions of their own worth as well. It can go either way. The Pharisee thought he was pretty fabulous because of all the rules he kept and the money he gave. The Samaritan woman at the well thought that she was worthless because she had not kept the rules and didn't have money or status. **Both parties were equally deluded.**

I didn't care where that old beat-up wooden table had lived prior to ending up in that garage. I couldn't have cared less if the Queen of England herself had sat at it, much less Aunt Susie. For me, it was just a functional project table. For me, the seeker, that table had very little value. Likewise, I have a little plastic rhinoceros on my shelf that no one would give a quarter for, but to me it's priceless because Neal knew that the rhino is my favorite animal at the zoo and he bought that rhino for me when he was about four and that rhino has occupied a place on a shelf in my office for the last 10 years. When I move, one of the first things I do is unpack the box with Neal's rhino in it.

Of course, most people are happy in their delusions. Just leave me alone and let me believe what I want and don't confuse me with facts. You know why the Israelites were lost in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses wouldn't ask directions. God is not surprised that we get lost folks. It is no big surprise to him when our various delusions lead us off down a merry path and we end up all twisted up and turned around. **That is why he sent Jesus!**

Philip looked at Jesus and said, "Lord we don't know the way to the place you are going!" He was all panicked because Jesus said he was leaving and Philip rightly had no confidence in himself to find the way by himself. Philip might have been the only disciple in the room who was not deluded. While the others sat back, nodded and smiled and thought, "yes, yes Lord, you go ahead and we will be right behind you because we are so holy, so good, so proper," Philip said, "WAIT LORD! Hold up! I don't know the way!" No delusion there. Philip knew that the only value he had in this world was the value Jesus placed in him. He knew that without his Lord, he was nothing.

It takes great faith to break out of our delusions and realize that the reason we have value is because God loves us – no other reason. That lost sheep was just a sheep. Who cares if one is lost when there are 99 others to care for? God does, because it's HIS SHEEP. That lost coin was just a coin, like a penny on the street. Who cares if one penny falls on the ground? God does because it's HIS PENNY.

We get older and we think we get wise. We think we know what makes us valuable – our looks, our intelligence, our abilities, our kindness, our money, but none of that is what makes us valuable. Oh to have the faith of a child – to know where our value lies. It's not what you know. It's WHO YOU KNOW! A little Roman Catholic child came up to me at the mall one day with tears in his eyes and said, "Father, I can't find my mom?" He saw the collar. He knew that the collar represented Christ and he had complete faith that I knew where his mom was. As it turns out, she was just around the corner and came running before I even really had to figure out what to do about this lost child. Like Philip, the child was lost, he knew he was lost and he

asked directions from someone who represented Jesus. And what did Jesus tell Philip?

“I am the way!” Don’t delude yourselves. Jesus was the way then and is the way now. God sent him to be the way because he knew that we would get lost and we would need someone to find us and that is what Jesus does. He searches high and low, day by day finding us in all of our delusions of grandeur and feeding us with his very body and blood, whispering his words in our ears and carrying us back to his father reminding us over and over and over again that we have been found, that we are loved by God and that we are his treasured possession.

No matter what you have done. Regardless of the heinous thoughts that have crossed your mind. Despite the cruel and heartless words that have fled past your lips. You are forgiven and you are loved. You ate the apple with our mother, Eve, but our brother Christ came looking for you, found you and restored you to his kingdom. Amen.