

“He Seeks, We Seek” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 15

September 6, 2026

- I. **Matthew 18:11** – ¹¹For the Son of Man came to save the lost.
- II. **Some people struggle with directions and getting lost.**
 - a. Several different factors are involved with directions and location-finding, but not everyone pays attention to these things.
 - i. For example, if I say Mt. Hood is... (point finger) or, Washington is... or the coast is... Not everyone has a sense of direction.
 - b. I read an article by a David Uttal, who considers himself a poor navigator... he even got lost for two days in the woods as a boy scout.
 - i. He began to wonder why some people struggle with navigating and getting lost.
 - ii. The world is full of people like that... along with the other side where some folks know exactly where they are and how get there.
 - iii. The little exercise I showed you just a minute ago is something scientists use to measure a person's navigational ability... as you sit in a building and point things out quickly... or not.
 - 1. One scientist mentioned that certain people literally have no concept or idea of where things are once they come into a building.
 - iv. The difference is often how you were brought up and where... as people from the country do better than those from the cities.
 - 1. Researchers believe that life experience is one of the biggest reasons someone can navigate well... and, we can lose that skill if we stop using it.
 - 2. A study of people who use GPS to get around asked the participants to just navigate without it.
 - a. They found that even the good navigators who used GPS constantly were much less capable without GPS.¹
 - c. How easy is it to just trust someone else's skills to navigate... or trust a handy little screen with all the answers?
 - i. We often have conversations about how Artificial Intelligence is a blessing and a curse... as some use it for good, and others use it instead of their brain.
 - ii. How many people will simply trust the words of a computer over... I don't know... maybe the guidance and direction of God the Holy Spirit?
 - d. You see, those who don't know Jesus are lost... they cannot find their way without the Holy Spirit coming to them... as they are guided by a world filled with sin and brokenness.

- i. We, on the other hand, are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and have God's Word to constantly support and encourage us throughout this journey...
 - ii. Unless we stop going to the Word... or to church... or spending time with other Christians... or stop praying and seeking God's guidance... or stop receiving the gifts of grace in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - iii. Even Christians can begin to slowly reject God by going to other places for comfort and direction...
- III. **Jesus helps us to remember** that sin causes people to get lost... and that God never wants anyone to be away from Him.
 - a. In fact, Jesus says that we should remain humble in faith like a child, and especially not partake in the sins that would lead someone astray.
 - b. Yet, more than that, Jesus tells His disciples... and us... that we should always be ready to seek out reconciliation... to seek our brother or sister out and with God's help restore our relationship.
 - c. By way of telling us the parable of the lost sheep, He reminds us of how important it is to find anyone who has gone astray.
 - i. When you think about the ninety-nine, they are left together... they don't need to be found or to get home somehow... so the shepherd goes and finds the one who is lost and rejoices over finding one astray because it's one more life saved from destruction.
 - ii. Don't misunderstand, God loves us beyond measure... yet we are not lost, but have already been found... But how about the ones who are astray?
 - d. I cannot give all the answers about why a person might stray from the love of Jesus... but usually it involves the will.
 - i. The part of us that wants control... our own way... doesn't fit well into God's design and the Church.
 - 1. As I mentioned before, some people start listening to the world around them and it leads them away from God.
 - 2. Others struggle with God's Word and disagree with it because it doesn't allow them to live how they want... or in the way they think is right.
 - ii. Still others have been hurt by the church in some way... or had a bad experience with someone they trusted... and instead of reconciling as Jesus calls us to do, they leave the church... and sometimes their Lord.
 - e. One of my seminary professors, Dr. David Peter, explained that a false belief runs around some Christian denominations – “once saved always saved.”
 - i. As Lutherans we do not believe that a person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ is always saved and in the faith no matter what... we

believe that someone over time can harden their hearts and walk away.

- ii. Yes, we all know people who walked away from their faith and we grieve over them...
- iii. Yet, there is also another false belief that we can be guilty of as Christians... "once lost, always lost."
- f. You see, for many of us, we use different excuses for why it's not our job to seek out those astray...
 - i. For one thing, we figure it's none of our business why they walked away from God... and we think of faith as a private matter that's between God and them.
 - ii. Or, we might just say to ourselves, they know the truth and rejected it, they will find their way back if it's God's will.
 - iii. But Jesus talks about going to great lengths to find a lost sheep... and when we just give up because it's not our job, it is a sin against the person... and a sin against God.

IV. **Our God is not a once lost, always lost kind of God.**

- a. The constant theme throughout all Scripture is the lost are restored... that God never wants a person to remain in sin and distant from Him.
 - i. Jesus even says in verse 14, "So it is not the will of My Father Who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."
 - ii. When it says little ones... that is not just children... but all people.
- b. In the Gospel of Luke, where we find the Parable of the Lost Sheep followed by the Parable of the Lost Son... the celebration is completely opposite of how we might respond... but the father embraces his once dead son and proclaims that he is now alive!
- c. In truth, every one of us is the lost sheep... or as Isaiah 53 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)
 - i. None of us can claim perfection or being sinless and holy... without Jesus... because He took our sins upon Himself on the cross.
 - ii. When we talk about great lengths... The Father sending the Son to be our atoning sacrifice is the greatest length ever gone.
 - iii. That's how much God loves you... That's how much God loves the lost... He would never just give up and say it's up to someone else... He never gives up seeking... restoring... and redeeming.

V. **We might not be the best at navigating... or we may be great.**

- a. Yet, there is only one direction that truly matters – the cross and Jesus Christ.
- b. No matter where we are, we can always point to the reconciliation, the redemption, and the restoration in Jesus.
- c. We don't consider the lost beyond redemption... and because Jesus seeks the lost... as His disciples, we seek the lost as well.

- d. Every one of us falls into the “once lost” category, and without our God coming to us... through the Word... through Baptism... through the Lord’s Supper... we would have remained without rescue.
 - i. But what does Jesus do? By the power of the Holy Spirit He works through us... sharing the Word... sharing forgiveness... and continuing to seek the lost.
- e. And so, as the Son of Man came to save the lost, we never stop pointing the lost to the one place we were found... the cross of Jesus Christ.

¹ Source: Bob Holmes, “Why do some people always get lost?” *Knowable Magazine* (4-10-24)