

I notice that when people get excited their voices start to go up in volume. It seems the more excited they get the louder they talk. And if they're even more excited they get even louder. I don't know what it is within humans that makes that happen, but it sure helps to know when someone is really into something, really excited, when they're passionate.

The opposite isn't necessarily true. It isn't that when someone isn't excited they speak really softly. Actually when someone isn't excited, when they're not passionate, they likely aren't speaking at all. And to Jesus that's part of the problem. Instead of excitement or lack of regarding something not really important, it's souls. The souls of people. They fall into two camps, and only two. Lost and found.

Jesus noticed the lost, in fact he was on the earth for the lost. He came to come find the lost. It was his life's work and he was passionate about it. Not everyone shared his passion for the lost. Either they didn't see themselves as lost, they didn't worry about those lost souls, or they didn't have time. Jesus doesn't want us falling into that same thinking. So in the gospel he tells two stories that really give one main point.

**Love speaks passionately
Pursue lost souls
Rejoice in found souls**

If I dined with movie stars and CEOs it would say a lot about the company I keep. Jesus wasn't dining with the CEO of some company, but tax collectors and sinners. People society forgot or wanted to forget. The religious leaders of the Jews looked down upon these sinners. Sinners weren't worth the time to say hello, much less eat with. When Jesus did eat with them the religious leaders were shocked. Didn't he know they were sinners? Didn't he realize they were to be avoided?

Jesus knew, that's why he told the stories. **"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"** An owner of one hundred sheep could probably afford the loss. That particular sheep wouldn't have special wool, wasn't more important than the ninety-nine. It was simply a sheep that wandered away, couldn't keep up, and did what sheep do. The worthiness wasn't in the sheep, it was in the value the shepherd gave. This sheep was special and precious and worth pursuing. It was lost but loved, and needed to be found.

Jesus took the story further. He had heavenly meanings in mind. Then another story with the same twist. **"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"** It's a coin. I pass pennies on the ground all the time. I sometimes drop pennies and leave them because they aren't worth stopping for. It couldn't be the coin. She wasn't worried about the financial impact. It's not the value of the coin, it's the value coming from the woman. Grasp the heavenly meaning. This woman placed incredible value on the coin. So much passion for something that was lost that she went after it, hard. Lamps, sweeping, searching, she wouldn't stop until the coin was found.

Think of those sinners listening to Jesus that the Jewish religious leaders didn't want anything to do with. Who are the sinners of our day? The drug addict or alcoholic who can't keep a job? The unwed mother, the divorcee, someone with a bunch of tattoos? The abused or for that matter the abuser, the convict? Do we silently or not so silently give the impression these need to clean up their messes before they can come and sit with us on a Sunday? Is it possible they get the impression from us that forgiveness from Christ and relationship with him are based on how good you are first, how you dress, or keep yourself? We might forget that if these people don't know Jesus they're lost souls. They're lost and we don't see the worth in pursuing them.

Each soul is precious to Jesus and someone he wants to seek after and find. Each soul wandering around by itself is someone Jesus wants to pursue. It's not the redeeming quality in the person, it's not how good they are, or how special. It's because of love. One out of ten or one out of one hundred, Jesus does whatever's necessary to pursue lost souls. Love led Jesus to lay down his life for lost souls, all souls. He was willing to go to great lengths of sacrifice to pay for the sins of lost souls. And you and I were once lost. Jesus pursued you and me, leaving ninety-nine others alone to come find us. Jesus' love thought you were worth it to passionately pursue because you were lost.

That same passion is what Jesus wants us to have for others who are still lost. Pursue them by speaking with love passionately to overcome reasons why we might not speak at all. The outcome is in Jesus' hands. The person might listen. The ninety-nine will still be cared for. Christ overcomes excuses with his love. The lost don't know the comforting arms of Jesus, we do. The lost don't know what it's like to be found by Christ, we do. We can have passion to pursue lost souls.

On Thursday I was setting up the projector cart for a video after worship today. It's something different because my laptop can't play video on both screens and that really bugs me like it probably does you too. Plus last time the video was behind the audio and that bugs me too. So I found a DVD player in an old computer and put it into the computer under the cart. I wasn't sure it would work, but when I started everything up it worked great. And I did a fist pump and thanked God. It was a good feeling for something not very important really. The shepherd, the woman, they both found things that in the larger scheme weren't that important. But they were still so happy they rejoiced. I would've high fived someone on Thursday, but no one was around. That's the thing about joy, it's great, but it's even greater if it can be shared. We too can rejoice in found souls.

The shepherd carried his precious sheep back to the flock and immediately called friends and neighbors. **“Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.”** The woman searched until she found that coin and then she called friends and neighbors. **“Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.”** Joy needed to be shared. The lengths God’s love has gone to save sinners is infinitely further. And the joy is infinitely greater. **“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”** The angels of God, God’s chorus, cheer and rejoice when just one sinner repents and is found.

Contrast that with the reaction of the Jewish religious leaders. They’re mad Jesus is even eating with these sinners. Never mind these sinners are hearing the Savior give them a one on one lesson. Never mind these sinners are hearing law and gospel, the call to repent because they’re sinful and the proclamation that they’re forgiven because of God’s grace. Never mind these sinners are being won by Christ himself and brought from lost to found. The religious leaders show no joy because they don’t think they’re sinners. But Jesus saw lost souls who were being found. He was happy, he rejoiced. And when even one of those sinners repented and was brought to faith by the Holy Spirit angels in heaven rejoiced.

Victories like that seem few and far between. Seeing the people who have left, been lost, or just plain abandoned Christ in the last years is easier yet painful. That’s not worth celebrating. It may have taken our joy so we don’t even see victories anymore. It might be worse. We may take for granted the grace of Christ. Our rescue from sin might not be important. We might think those coming out of sinfulness don’t deserve the celebration. We didn’t approve of what sinful things they did, we weren’t sure about even having them here, and now we figure joy would give the wrong impression like we approve of their sin.

Celebrate with joy not because of us or them, but because of Christ. Remember your rescue and how it came about. Jesus came to this earth and endured a tremendous amount of suffering. More than we can even imagine. It was suffering that went all the way to his being nailed to the cross. There his friends, his nation, and God too abandoned him. When he died it seemed like all was lost. But he rose again from the dead. That’s where the joy enters. We have joy because Christ lives. Our joy comes from that resurrection and how that connects to us.

It stirs the passion in us to remember the victories. Christ’s victory in recent confirmations, adult baptisms, the connections we’ve made. You have people you’ve talked with, you were passionate about. Celebrate and rejoice over the person you told about a particular sin in love and because of your patient care from the Bible they repented and were brought back. It’s a victory of grace. It’s a found soul. The angels rejoice, we should too.

Jesus showed the passion he has for each individual human being with these two stories. Every soul is one that is lost and needs to be found. He was willing to do anything to go after all of them. It cost him his life, but it gave every lost soul life. They need to be found so it can be shared with them. That’s what Jesus was about and that’s what he wants us about too. Every soul is precious. Be passionate about them. Pursue the lost and rejoice in the found.