



September 11, 2022

## Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near  
to listen to Jesus...—Luke 15:1*



Dear Friends,

Theologian Howard Thurman has a lovely reflection on this parable of the Lost Sheep:

*“A sheep is enjoying his grass...and then he started feeling chilly, he didn’t recall, but the only thing he remembers is that suddenly he became aware that he was cold, and there was a throwback in his mind, and he realized that he had been cold for some time. But the grass was good. Then he looked around, and he discovered that he was alone. That everybody had gone. That is all the sheep had gone. And he began crying aloud.*

*And the shepherd, who had many sheep, missed him when he got back to the fold, and he left his ninety and nine...to try and find the sheep that was lost. And Jesus says, “God is like that.” Nothing heavy or theological about that....Just that here is a shepherd who loves his sheep, and one of the sheep in doing the most natural thing in the world—and that is to eat the grass—did it with such enthusiasm and over a time interval of such duration that he didn’t know when the shepherd called, and he was lost.*

*And why was he lost? He was lost because he was out of touch...with the group that sustained him, the group that fed him, that gave him a sense that he counted. That’s all. And as soon as he was out there alone, he said, “I’m just here by myself. Nothing but me in all this? And I want to feel that I count with others.” There’s a certain warmth in that. There’s a certain something that is creative and redemptive about the sense of community, about the fellowship...*

*Now, Jesus says that God is like the shepherd, seeking always to find those who are out of community with their fellows, and when they have found it, when they have found their community with their fellows, then all the world seems to fit back in place, and life takes on a new meaning...”*

Benedictine Sister, Joan Chittister, recently penned an article titled, *“What the U.S. needs most right now, what we lack, is community.”* Sister Joan catalogues the ills that plague us as a society. She writes, *“We get further and further away from a sense of common care—the public understanding of what community is really about. And it is showing.”* She says what we need is community. Our sense for the needs of others is our hope.

We like a bunch of lost sheep are pursuing our own pursuits regardless of the effects on everyone else. The gap between the super-rich and everyone else; the continued push for fossil fuels despite the fallout for coming generations; the inequities in the justice system where blacks are incarcerated at a rate of 5-to-1 compared to whites; the lack of a living wage for people; our political system divided, dug in, and not listening; all these speak of our inability to realize that we are all part of the same pasture. If we do not discover our need for the rest of the flock, we will be left out in the cold.

As Thurman summarizes the parable: *“The lost sheep. The searching shepherd. And the cry of anguish of the sheep was the voice of identification that the shepherd heard. That is how God is, if we let him.”*

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

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