

SUNDAY SCHOOL NOTES: 11 SEPTEMBER 2016

SENIORS: Luke 15: Three pictures, one idea

Sometimes Jesus told different stories on the same theme so that each person in the crowd would think about the one they liked best. In the chapter we are looking at today Jesus told 3 short stories to explain how much God loves us.

Perhaps the first story was for the men or boys. It was about a shepherd who was looking after 100 sheep. Suddenly he realised that one was missing! (It's amazing that he noticed, but these sheep were important to him and he was constantly on the lookout to protect them.) Immediately, he set off to look for it. He hunted high and low. Eventually he found it and he was thrilled! Although he was probably tired, he picked it up and carried it on his shoulders – possibly it was injured or exhausted. Then when he got home, he called out to everyone to share his joy: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."

The second story has the same idea, but perhaps this was directed at the women. He told of a poor woman who had 10 silver coins. One day she realised one was missing and even though she had nine more, she was desperate to find the missing one. So she lit the lamp to create more light and took her broom and started to sweep into every corner of the house where it might have rolled. Eventually she found it and, like the shepherd, she called out to her friends and relatives, inviting them to join her in celebrating.

The third story is possibly the most well-known story in the Bible, but sadly folk know the story and don't remember what it is about. It is a bit more complicated, but see if you can recognise the same 3 things: something lost, something found and a celebration.

Once there was a son who wanted to leave home. Maybe he was tired of being bossed around; maybe he just wanted some adventures. He went to his father and asked if he could have his inheritance money immediately as he wanted to set off on his own. This was quite often done in those days for the money would be used to start a business.

This son didn't use the cash wisely. He just wasted it – entertaining, partying, drinking, over-eating. Until one day he realised he was broke. But none of his good-time friends was interested in helping him. They had only been keen to spend his money. Desperate, he eventually managed to find a job, looking after pigs. Now even today pigs are pretty disgusting animals – they just snuffle and grunt and eat and roll in the dirt. And in those days Jews were not meant to have anything to do with them. But sonny boy didn't have a choice – it was pigs or starvation! In fact, he even tried to eat some of the dried food that was meant for the pigs – he was that desperate!

As he sat there he began to think about his parents' home. He knew that even the slaves there were better off than he was – they had clothes and food and company. The more he thought, the more he knew what he must do. He resigned from his job and started off home, planning to ask if he could become a servant there, labouring in the fields. Anything was better than pig-watching!

Just as he (tired and weary and hungry) caught sight of the house, he realised someone was running along the road in his direction. It was his father! His father was so glad to see his son again, he

wouldn't even listen to the son's carefully rehearsed speech. He called out to the slaves to heat water for the boy to bath, to get new clothes for him and to prepare a meal. They were going to celebrate! His son had come home!

You know that over the last few weeks we have been talking about taking off wrong attitudes like pride and greed and foolishness. We all know we still do wrong things, even though we plan to put on Christ-like behaviour. The great news from today's lesson is that God and his family wants to welcome us back with great joy. But don't stay away too long. God wants to celebrate today!