

Scripture: Luke 15:3-10; Ezekiel 34:11-16

Text: Ezekiel 34:11

Message: God Seeking Us

January 28, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON      Cadet Sunday

Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

Let's start this message with a little game. There are some sheep and coins hidden in the front of the church. Can you boys find them?

*Cadets go on a search*

Some of them were very easy to find. Some were tucked away and took a bit more effort.

Sometimes we hide things from other people because we don't want anyone else to find it. Maybe you did that with your Hallowe'en candy, so you can have it all for yourself. You hid it from your brothers and sisters and Mom and Dad.

Some Moms and Dads got boxes of chocolates at Christmas and they put them in hiding places so other people in the family won't find it. They want to enjoy it themselves.

Sometimes hiding things is a game. Maybe your friends hide your birthday presents, so you will have to go and look for them before you can open them and enjoy them.

These are all fun ideas about hiding things. There are also some reasons for hiding that are not so good.

We might hide from someone because we are afraid of what they are going to do to us. Maybe they have hurt us and we don't want them to find us.

Or sometimes we hide because we did something bad and we know we are going to get punished for it. Like the time you broke your Mom's favourite cookie jar. After you hid the broken pieces, you went and hid yourself because you knew you were in trouble.

That's something that has been happening since the beginning of the story in the Bible. The first people mentioned in the Bible are Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God and we read that they hid from God, because they knew they had done something wrong.

But the wonderful part of that story, and of God's Grand Story all through the Bible, is that God went looking for them. "Adam, where are you? Why are you hiding?" God went looking for them and found them. He made it clear that they had done wrong, but he also showed kindness to them. He gave them clothes and then made a promise that someday everything would be right again.

A picture that we find in many places in the Bible is the picture of a shepherd caring for his sheep. Part of caring for sheep is protecting them. Part of caring for sheep is looking for them when they get lost.

Getting lost can happen so easily. Let's say you're walking through the park with your family. You see a cute dog, or a special coloured bird, or a ball laying under a bush. You stop to look. Or you walk over to the dog. Or you go to get the ball. When you start walking again, you might forget where you had come from, and just keep walking from where you are. Or you don't see your family, so you guess which way they went. Or you see something else that's really cool and you go to see that, because that's more special than walking with your family.

Before long, your family is nowhere to be seen. And you are in a new part of a strange park and don't know where you are. You're lost.

But then you think you hear your name. And it sounds like a familiar voice that's calling your name. You start to go toward that voice and might even shout back, "I'm over here." And pretty soon you see your family. They have come looking for you.

Sheep can get lost quite easily too. They go after some yummy grass. Or they see a flower. Or they chase a butterfly. They go around a bit of a hill or a rock and soon they can't see the rest of the flock. They keep wandering and get very lost.

Now a shepherd might have a whole bunch of sheep. The story Jesus told talks about 100 sheep, which was a very big flock for someone to have. So if you have a hundred sheep, is it so bad to lose one? Oh well. There's still 99 other sheep.

But that's not how the shepherd thinks. Every one of his sheep is important. He goes out to look for that lost sheep to bring it home. He searches all over the place. He calls out to it. He listens to hear if the sheep is calling. He looks around rocks and behind bushes and in valleys. He keeps searching until he finds the lost sheep. Every one of his sheep is important.

You are one of God's sheep. Whether you are a boy in Cadets or the parent or grandparent or friend who brings you to Cadets; whether you are a brother or sister of one of the Cadets; or whoever you are, God loves you. You are special to him.

Sometimes we might not think so. We have done something wrong. Or we said something that hurt another person's feelings. Or we didn't try really hard to do our best. We

try to hide from God. We feel ashamed of what we did. We don't think God cares about us because we have hurt him. Or we don't think we're worth it. We're not good enough to be God's sheep. We're not good enough to receive his love.

There was a man in the Bible named David. He was a powerful king, but he did some things that were really wrong, even arranging to have someone killed. Sometimes David wondered if God cared about him, or if he had done too many bad things. He thought about hiding from God. But he realized he could not do that. A song that David wrote says:

Is there any place I can go to hide from your presence?

If I climb to the sky, you're there! If I go underground, you're there!

If I flew on morning's wings to the far western horizon,

You'd find me in a minute—you're already there waiting!

Then I said to myself, "Oh, he even sees me in the dark!

At night I'm immersed in the light!"

It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you. (See *Psalms 139*)

We cannot hide from God, because he never gives up looking for us when we try to hide. He wants to be with us. He wants us to be with him. Because he loves us.

He loves us so much that he sent his own Son Jesus to suffer for us, to forgive all the wrongs that we do. Jesus died on the cross to take our punishment. He rose again from the dead so that we can have this new life as loved children of God.

This same King David was a shepherd himself before he became king. So he understood what it was like to go searching for lost sheep. He wrote another wonderful psalm that says, "The Lord is my shepherd. I don't need a thing. He takes care of me always."

That's what our theme verse from Ezekiel 34 is talking about. God is our shepherd who cares for his sheep. The sheep are people. We are God's sheep. Sometimes those sheep, those people wander away from God and get lost. But he keeps seeking us, looking for us, finding us, bringing us back to know his love and care.

Trust God's love. Believe that he loves you.

Enjoy his love and his care for you every day.

See how God loves and cares for you through other people in your life.

Thank God every day as you share his love with others.

Amen.