



## The Lost Sheep

Wildwood Mennonite Church // June 21, 2020

Worship Leader: Eileen KH // Music Leader: Lois M // Sermon: Ben B

### Welcome to Wildwood...

... or rather, thanks for welcoming us into wherever you are in this at-home worship format. By now this greeting probably feels familiar--for better or for worse, this is our new normal as a church community for now. Even as the province continues to "open back up" our church gatherings are quite limited. And this is still the right thing, for the health and safety of ourselves and our neighbours, though we do miss our routine, we miss our friends, we miss our opportunity to see/hear/touch the Spirit of God in the physical presence of our church family.

But still, here we are, still connected to one another through these words and prayers, still trusting in the same goodness and love of our Creator. No matter where you've been and what you've done this week, no matter your fears and frustrations and hopes or lack thereof, you are welcome in this place of worship and you are not alone.

For those joining us via zoom welcome to our Wildwood worship gathering this morning. As we look across the dear faces in the households collected here, may we settle into this community space and trust that our internet connections and cell phone data packages, God's love and the Holy Spirit will bind us together. Come, let us worship.

**Music For Meditation // [Por la mañana \(At Break of Day\)](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #647**

### Call to Worship

It is good to be together, God,  
in this place, with these people, at this time,  
together listening for your voice.

In this hour of worship  
tell us about your kingdom of kindness  
so that we can seek it.


Show us your justice.

We want to walk with you,  
humbly, closely, daily.

Amen.

(from Leading in Worship, Carol Penner)

## Peace Candle



Let us revel in summer.  
Let us soak up the long days and warm sun.  
Let our imaginations be shaped by the blossoms and fruits,  
by the birdsongs and animal tracks,  
that we may remember  
our humble place in creation,  
that we may remember  
to be human together,  
that we may remember  
to honour the gifts of the earth,  
that we may remember  
to live simply and well,  
that we may remember  
our very breath comes from  
our generous Creator.  
May our lives give this witness.

## Offering Prayer

God of grace,  
we know you want to see justice rolling down like water.  
Accept these gifts from our hands,  
may they, like a flowing stream,  
reshape our world,  
creating pools of justice  
and join generous rivers of love. Amen

(adapted from Leading in Worship, Carol Penner)

## Song // [The King of Love My Shepherd Is](#)

## Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Jenny!](#)

Today's story is [Just A Mess](#) by Mercer Mayer.

## Scripture // **Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:3-7 (The Inclusive Bible translation)**

### **Matthew 18:12-14**

*What do you think? Suppose a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them strays away—won't the shepherd leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? If the shepherd finds it, the truth is, there is more joy over the one found than over the ninety-nine that didn't stray. In the same way, it is never the will of your Abba God in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.*

**Luke 15:3-7**

Jesus then addressed this parable to them: “Who among you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, doesn’t leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and search for the lost one until it’s found? And finding it, you put the sheep on your shoulders in jubilation. Once home, you invite friends and neighbors in and say to them, ‘Rejoice with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent.

**Sermon // “The Lost Sheep” // Ben Borne**

(If you’d rather watch than read, [click here for the full video version](#) on youtube)

*I’m not sure how long it’s been since we’ve talked. Years for sure. Since we last met, I finished school and started a new job.*

*Things are going well. Ish in that regard.*

*But yeah, sorry. Back to the whole “it’s been a while” thing.*

*If you had to ask me where it all began, I don’t think I could tell you.*

*I can’t pinpoint a specific day. It just happened.*

*I had to leave you.*

*Last time, it was only for a few weeks and I came around. You barely noticed.*

*But this time it’s been much, much longer.*

*I feel very sad about it. I know that we had some good times together.*

*And when I think about it ... about me leaving...I feel very anxious. I feel shame. But mostly, I feel disconnected.*

*I don’t want you to worry because you didn’t do anything wrong.*

*And to be honest, I feel like you did everything right. But I just can’t show up.*

*This is something that I’ve struggled with my entire life.*

*I haven’t been able to show up for my relationships.*



*I haven't been able to show up for my co-workers.*

*I haven't been able to show up for my family.*

*And now I haven't been able to show up for you either.*

*There is a deep well of unresolved pain inside me that I can't seem to shake. It comes and goes but it's always there.*

*My counsellor says I have unresolved childhood traumas that are holding me back. These are called "adverse childhood experiences".*

*She says that the tumultuous upbringing I had has shaped me into who I am today. My father neglected me and eventually left our family and didn't support us. My mom had to work two jobs to keep us afloat and I had to grow up too quick to help raise my sister and brother.*

*This upbringing introduced toxic stress into my brain at a young age. This has made it difficult for me to connect because life has trained me to be afraid of being exploited by other people and hurt by other people.*

*This is why I back away.*

*I am afraid of connection.*

*I am afraid of intimacy, vulnerability, and letting you know me.*

*I've spent years with my walls up.*

*I don't have long-term, sustained relationships.*

*I run away from vulnerable situations.*

*I drown myself in work and focus on being a high achiever in order to get those pats on the back.*

*I don't think I could stand being validated for who I am, only for what I do.*

*Now, I recognize I have a problem, and I guess that's why I am working on it in counselling.*

*But I don't know how to tell you that this is what I'm going through.*

*Because as I said, I struggle with being vulnerable, but I also struggle with a deep fear that when I let you in, you will reject me.*



*I am so afraid that you will leave.*

*I am so afraid that I am too much for you.*

*If I was honest, I feel threatened by you.*

*I see you as so open.*

*Loving.*

*Caring.*

*Thoughtful.*

*A light in the dark.*

*These are so incongruent with what I believe I am worth.*

*I struggle with this idea that I am worthy of the love and belonging. And that's all you are.*

*You are love and belonging.*

*And because of that, I had to leave.*

*I feel like YOU are better off without ME.*

...

*But I also struggle.*

*Because there is also a longing inside me that I can't let go.*

*Longing for relationship with my father.*

*Longing for a better relationship with my mother.*

*Longing for a childhood that I missed.*

*Longing for friendships.*

*Longing for a relationship with you.*

...



*I am lonely*

...

*I am lonely everywhere I go. And anyone I am with. Even romantic partners – which I struggle to understand. I thought that by dating and seeing someone that would stop the loneliness.*

*But I was wrong.*

*I am lonely because I want to connect and be accepted, but I can't, because I am afraid.*

*My counsellor and I recently had a breakthrough though. Which is nice. It feels good to finally have a breakthrough!*

*She says that chronically lonely people withdraw, whether we mean to or not.*

*And this was really interesting, that lonely brains detect social threats twice as fast as non-lonely brains.*

*And that this hyper vigilance makes it very easy for me to perceive welcoming people and situations as threats.*

*That I flee into self-preservation mode. Which means I will avoid people and distrust even those who reach out to help me.*

*And then eventually, which you know, with prolonged loneliness, I'll decline invitations and stop answering texts.*

*The reality is, the loneliness I experience fuels more loneliness.*

*And eventually, I just check out.*

*Which you know. Because I checked out on you.*

*I remember that after a few months when I went silent on you, you tried to connect.*

*But I avoided.*

*And then you emailed me.*

*You said that you missed me.*

*That I was still a part of you.*



*That I belonged with you.*

*But I just didn't believe this is true.*

*And so I ignored you again.*

*And then you went silent.*

*...*

*I can only presume that you checked out on me, because I checked out on you.*

*Which is fair...but also unfair.*

*Because I felt like you were a lifeline.*

*And I thought you believed in a God that searched out and rejoiced in finding the one that got away.*

*Your persistence at the beginning was a little bit much.*

*It wasn't what I needed – and that wasn't your fault.*

*And if I had to be honest – I didn't know what I needed.*

*But then years passed, and you just stopped.*

*And so I stayed away.*

*And I keep staying away, because I am threatened, but also because I don't know how to love you the same way you love me.*

*Truthfully - it doesn't make sense to me.*

*On one hand, it seems illogical and counter cultural. But on the other hand, isn't that what you're all about? Being a little illogical? Being a little counter cultural?*

*Is this what your will be done, looks like?*

*I'm struggling.*

*I'm struggling because I don't know how to make sense of the loving kindness and care you are offering me, still, to this day.*



*But I'm also struggling because I don't know how to come back to you.*

*I don't know how to come back to a relationship that has felt so broken for so long.*

*I feel so much embarrassment and shame for the way I left things.*

*Because I know that we made a commitment together.*

*I know that I said yes to you, and the water was poured.*

*We broke bread.*

*We poured out wine.*

*We shared good moments together. And I threw it all away. That's how it feels.*

*I threw it all away, and now you've moved on, and it seems you're happier without me.*

*And I am alone.*

*...*

*I am lonely. And I don't know how to come back to you, because the tricky part is the fact that even when I am with you, I still feel alone.*

*I struggle with feeling seen.*

*I struggle with feeling heard.*

*But it was never your fault.*

*It was because I struggled with sharing who I was, and what I was struggling with.*

*But I need to be fair to myself as well.*

*Self-compassion is important.*

*I see now that I needed time.*

*I needed time to figure out my loneliness.*

*I needed time to build a trusting relationship with a person who could help me name my struggle.*





*I needed time to understand what I need.*

*I needed time to grow.*

*I needed time to come back to myself.*

*I needed time to start to yearn for you and what you mean in my life.*

*A community of people.*

*A community of people that I have longed to be a part of.*

*You are a community of people who are hospitable.*

*You are a community of people shining light in dark spaces.*

*You are a community of people not afraid to talk about difficult topics.*

*You are a community of people who reflect the life of Christ.*

*You are a community of people that made people feel like they belonged.*

*But you were not the community of people I needed at that time.*

*Because what I needed was time.*

*But now it's time for me to come back, but I don't know how to come back.*

*I need reassurance.*

*I need to know if you will still hospitable.*

*I need to know if you will still shine the light in dark spaces.*

*I need to know if you will receive me, difficult experiences and all.*

*I need to know if you will still communion with me.*

*I need to know if you will still show up for me.*

*I need to know if we can reconcile.*

*I need to know if I still belong.*



*Because I am afraid I screwed it all up.*

*I am afraid because I am alone. Because I am lost. Because you meant so much to me.*

*I need to know what coming back looks like because if I'm honest, coming back feels much harder than leaving.*

*And so I'll wait for you on the hillside.*

*Waiting for you to come find me, so that I can find you once more.*

*So we can celebrate together once more.*

*So we can share one cup and one body, once more.*

*"It is never the will of your Abba God in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost." Matthew 18:14*

Thank you for taking time to hear today's story. As you can probably tell I wanted to shake things up a little bit. I wanted to take this parable that we all know, flip it on its head and really think about the story from the perspective of the sheep that's lost – who they are, why they're lost – and think about it through the lens of a real human story.

So I have some questions I want to encourage us all to think about as we go through our week.

Who are "you" in the story? In the story we see "you" becomes the community. This is a letter written to a church community. Have you ever been or know someone who is lost? Isolated? Lonely? What does connection look like? What does coming back look like?

In the scripture we hear a reference to a shepherd and the shepherd goes to find the sheep that is lost. Who is the shepherd in our scripture? Is it you? Is it Christ? Is it the church? Where does the responsibility fall for seeking and finding the lost?

This scripture is calling us to be a reciprocal, caring community of people. What does that look like for those who are lost? How do we show up and respond? How do we celebrate their return?

If you're interested in reading or learning more about loneliness, the book [Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World](#) by Vivek H Murthy, MD (19th Surgeon General of the United States) formed the basis for a lot of my writing and the story today. It is a very moving book that talks about the different



kinds of loneliness that people experience and its impact on physical health and how we, both as people who are lost and also people who are in community, can still build cultures of connection and what that might look like.

**Song // [Nothing is Lost on the Breath of God](#) // Sing the Story # 121**

**Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)**

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

### **Congregational Prayer**

O God, our God,<sup>[i]</sup>  
Ruler of heaven and earth,  
This morning we pray for the leaders of our world, and of this country,  
Whether municipal, provincial, or federal.  
Help them to govern wisely and with integrity.  
Give them emotional stability, mental clarity,  
and physical endurance to do their work.  
Regardless of their faith,  
bestow upon them your grace and strength  
to effectively carry out their responsibilities  
to preserve justice and peace,  
to eradicate racism and promote equity,  
and to benefit all who live and work in our land.

O Lord, hear my prayer,  
O Lord, hear my prayer,  
When I call, answer me,  
O Lord, hear my prayer,  
Come and listen to me.

Welcoming God,<sup>[ii]</sup>  
you are the source of all goodness, generosity and love.  
We thank you for opening the hearts of many  
to those who are fleeing for their lives.  
We remember especially the family whom we are waiting to sponsor,  
And pray that we may be ready, when these times allow,



to open our arms in welcome,  
and reach out our hands in support.  
That the desperate may find new hope,  
and lives torn apart be restored.

O Lord, hear my prayer...

Compassionate God,<sup>[iii]</sup>  
Keep us under the shadow of your mercy.  
Sustain and support the anxious,  
be with those who care for the sick,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may find comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love.

O Lord, hear my prayer...

Amen.

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[i] Adapted from <https://centerforfaithandwork.com/article/prayers-government-workplace>

[ii] Adapted from <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers>

[iii] Adapted from <https://www.churchofengland.org/>

**Song // [Now Go In Peace](#) // Sing the Journey # 74**

### **Benediction**

Grace is on our lips  
and in our hearts this morning, Lord:  
your grace is in our hands.  
We take it with us,  
spreading graciousness  
wherever we go. Amen.

(adapted from Leading in Worship, Carol Penner)

