

As we move through the songs, two of the songs we'll be singing congregationally do have key changes on the left. I'll try to remind you so that we don't have too many solos from the congregation. So that means Steph will be doing something fancy on the keyboard and lifting up the key to a higher key. I'll be like, "Not yet, not yet, okay, let's go!" So believe me, it takes me enough practice to get that. We have a lot of wonderful music, I want to thank the new song singers. And we're going to take a look at one of the more perhaps misunderstood or overused or used incorrectly concepts in scripture. And that is of leaving the 99 for the sake of the one. So while we open the prayer, we'll enjoy our beautiful prayer. Father God, we do thank you for the opportunity to be in this sanctuary this morning. We love you and we appreciate you. And we come to you just as we stated before humbly, opening ourselves that you may use us as you will. Lord, I pray that you would inspire individuals to invest in your body here at Churchtown. May she continue to grow from the inside out to be the body that you want us to be, that you know us to be. In Jesus' name we pray that your Holy Spirit would lead us in the word today, lead us in song, lead us in prayer. Because you are the creator, the pastor, the teacher of this church. Amen. The opening word, and again we're going to read through this and we'll draw them together at the end. In Luke 15 you're going to notice another theme, last week's theme, 14, the week before that, the theme of 13. The people who put the chapters together at least ordered things that way. I'm always telling you not to read the chapter and subheadings and all of that. But you can see that the teachings of Jesus are grouped in such a way that they bring forth something powerful for us to take away from that group of teachings. So I would urge you to go back 13 and 14 and 15 and of course you're going to catch on to this week's quite easily. This is Luke 15 verse 7 verses, "Tax collectors and other notorious sinners." I love that. Count yourself among them, that's everybody. Tax collectors and other notorious sinners. In other words, he's inviting you to come and listen to Jesus teach. We could do the sermon there and I can send you out with that notion because that's really important to understand. He's going to talk about those who believe they are righteous and they need to be humbled. And those who humbly come to Jesus, they will be elevated and given new life. So this opening word, this opening sentence is cornerstone to understanding that Jesus is reaching out to every man and woman. Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to Jesus to listen to him teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people and even eating with them. So you see sort of the irony of what's being presented here. I'm not going to preach all the way through it, but this is foundational. It's foundational because he's talking to you. Right? You have those who are self-righteous and those who understand that they're in need of the Savior. Blessed are those who are so poor in spirit that they know their need for a Savior. It's the same concept. So Jesus told them this story. If a man has a hundred sheep, none of them gets lost, what will he do? And one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-ninth others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds him? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors saying, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep." In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over the ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away. Leave that sit there to consider the fact that there's more joy in heaven. Now we're talking about a group of believers and a stray, and you go and you bring that stray back into the group. There's more joy in heaven for that one redeemed lost soul than for all of that group that is redeemed and together and worshiping. It's an odd concept, but it indicates the love of Christ that is to reach every individual soul. Leave that there. We're going to continue the fame of things that are lost. And not just the parable of the lost sheep, which is thrown out there all the time. And like I said, sometimes overused, sometimes misused. Because the rest of the teaching on this concept deals with other things. This one deals with a coin. Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp, sweep the entire house, search carefully until she finds it, and when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin." In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's

angel when even one sinner repents. So you can see that that is the same. One sinner repenting and the value of every individual human soul. But it's different because now we're talking about a lost coin and it's used in parallel as a teaching lesson. I don't know if I lose a quarter, well that's a silver coin, it probably is worth more than that, if I find it, I'm going to call up my neighbors and tell them that I found my other coin and be like, "Okay, great." But it's in there to prove a point. This is valuable in an earthly way and so Jesus is showing the many facets of value human beings have. And this one has nothing really to do with money, it has everything to do with how he views you and the value of you. For if in his house he were to lose one of you, that is incredibly important to him. And if we're in this house and there is somebody that is very close to you, your family, your friend, who is lost, and then they are found and they come into this house, he's telling us, "Heaven rejoices." So you think you will often see Jesus Christ use money because he knows since the beginning of time, not just money but wealth, is so important to human beings. He will use that regularly as a touchstone for his teaching. And if you can imagine how happy the woman was to find one lost silver coin, Jesus says, "Imagine how God in heaven rejoices when one lost soul repents and turns to him. The house of the Lord on earth will rejoice and the heavenly kingdom will rejoice." And the power of this is the fact that we're talking about one person. I often say, "You can change the world, the Christian church can help change the world, how? One conversation at a time." And I would love to be able to, I won't say a magic wand because I don't want to be a Holy Spirit wand, and say, "Don't you know what you're missing? Come into the house of the Lord." But that doesn't work, but I can sit with a stranger or a friend, a stranger or a family member, or a random encounter, which probably wasn't, and I can share what I know of the Lord and of salvation. And invite them, as Psalm 23 says, "into the house of the Lord forever." One person, one person. Agnes Day, if you look inside your folder you will see the famous picture, Agnes Day. Agnes Day means "Lamb of God," that's what this song is all about. And I found the famous painting of the Lamb of God, Agnes Day. And that last song we sang, you heard, as I had pointed out in one of the songs before, because this is what we're talking about, the one individual, right? And that whole last song was you, I, and Jesus. Those were pretty much the subjects of every sentence in that song. I, Jesus, Jesus, I, and this communal relationship that we have. And that is the point of what Jesus is trying to get across when he's saying the individual matters. The individual matters. And he's saying it in several contexts. He's talking about the church context. We have our church brothers and sisters here. And I'll pick on Jeff because nobody would ever see this ever happening. But now again, all of a sudden we see Jeff out gallivanting and doing this and doing that. What should we do? Oh well, that's his choice. Well it is, that's very true. But is he not our brother? Will not God rejoice in not only our efforts because we love him, but if he were to say, "You're right. I repent. I'm coming home." He's talking about it in the context out of the church, where you, as a faithful believer, again, a random encounter somewhere, dinner, table, family discussion, whatever the case may be, and there you are with a non-believing individual, and they say, "This happened to me, this happened to me, this happened to me. God can't be real because all I ever hear is God is good and all these things happened to me." Well you know, you know that everything that has happened to that individual is just a piece of the big picture of their existence, of who they are. And they can put all of those things that happened to them in perspective when they are filled with God's Holy Spirit. And you can teach them that and talk about that, and hopefully repentance will come and the flood of God's Holy Spirit will come in and they'll say, "You're right. Life is the good and the great and the tragic." But that's never the case. But sometimes we do have the great good fortune of meeting an individual in one of their most either vulnerable states, which is obviously an opportune time to speak of the divine, and I would say this, their angriest state. When they, "If God is real, you Christians and your God, why didn't my mom get cancer and died when I was 18?" That, okay, let's talk about that. Let's talk about that. The individual matters. Those are the lost sheep. The lost sheep from the flock. The lost sheep that are walking around out there that you will encounter one conversation at a time. So here we go. Luke 15, beginning with verse 11. Let's talk about that a little bit. Tax collectors and other notorious...oh, yeah. What did I do? I just did a wrong scripture. Did anybody notice

that I had the wrong scripture for the first reading? No. No? First one's right. What? First one was right. Yeah. What's the last one? The parable of the lost son. I wrote it. I wrote the sheep again. It's been a week. Sunday was an interesting day and I should probably wait for prayer, but some people might maybe. Ryan and I went to visit Jenny and Woody for the first time in a long time. And it was both tragic, to see what happened to the men, and glorious, to see their faith. And this I will say this, and we're about to talk to a couple that intends to get married here this year. After, I don't know, 45 years, how about when you see a marriage work that way? Because when you stand up there and say for better or for worse, you don't ever imagine him laying in a hospital bed with his skull stitched together in three places. And she's there with him all the time. And we're there praying. And that is the way it should work. That's inspiring. And I know we've had all kinds of experiences through the congregation, and some couples have been married a year or two, some couples have been married 60 years or more. And when you see that work the way it should, it's really inspiring. So we got to pray over that. And of course, after all the bad emotion on Sunday, you wake up at 8am to a jackhammer. And you're like, "Man, small church pastoring really is strange." You keep going from that to being a site foreman for a construction thing. My dog freaked out. I'm just babbling now because I need to. I need to share some premises. But Grace freaked out. She heard the jackhammer. I never expected that to be that loud. We had to hang around construction sites. That would be weird. But I haven't seen that terror in her eyes since July 4th when the fireworks went off. And so I'm sure the foreman guy who was here thought that I was really mad at him or something. I jumped in the jeep and he had me parked in. I pulled through the yard and around and out to the out. I grabbed Grace and took her down to the park real quick. Then I called the chemists and said, "Can we bring her over there?" And so we did that Monday and Tuesday. They were still jackhammering Wednesday, but their really loud jackhammer broke. So they had a softer jackhammer and Grace handled that okay. She handled that in. Grace. The lost son, the lost sheep, the lost coin. All are one of one. There's a sheep and a coin and a son. An animal, a thing, and a person. So the teaching is united and bringing across a very, very significant concept. A very, very significant thing that we must understand about the Lord and the value of the human soul. I've said it before, that comment by Spurgeon, "How valuable must be the human soul when both Satan and God coveted." Right? You're different. I tell you that all the time as well. You're very different. No. You're not a beast of the field. You are created uniquely among all creation. Body, soul, consciousness, all of that in the image and likeness of God. So you don't think that matters to Him. Who is going to create a child and say, "Well, I like that one, but that one doesn't matter to me." Any parent in here? A rhetorical question because I know you. No, you don't do that. Neither does God. Every single soul is valuable. To illustrate the point further, which is an indication that this is one unified teaching, Jesus told them this story. A man had two sons. The younger told his father, "I want my share of your estate now before you die." So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later, this younger son packed all of his belongings, moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all of his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him and the man sent him into the fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him, but no one gave him anything. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, "At home, even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger. I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'" So he returned home to his father and while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, kissed him. His son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against both you and heaven, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son." But his father said to the servants, "Quick, bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Kill the calf, we have been fattening. We must celebrate with the beast. For this son of mine was dead and now has returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." So the party began. Now there's commentary on that in the last couple of verses, which we'll just touch

upon, because the older son, who has been with the father, faithful to the father, has some feelings and things to say about that as well. But let's focus on this son and when it's ready, if you notice in this parable, it has what? Money, animals, and people. Jesus is bringing together his teaching and putting it out there. How valuable is that money to this kid? Oh, he thinks that's it. He's going to leave home. If he just gets the money, everything will be fine. The Lord knows how much we make idols of such things, and so he's teaching us that lesson because quickly, the money runs out. Then what? What do you got? You got pigs and you got pig food. And so he's there, he's trying to scrape by surviving, because of his pride. He's already forsaken his father, he's already left home, he's eating, he's craving the food that he feeds the pigs. And it won't give him any of it. But yet he does that for who knows how long because he could have turned around and gone to back home, but he doesn't. His pride won't allow him to because he knows what he did. In fact, it gets to such a point that he knows what he did that he says, "I will go to my father and I will repent of what I did." Same teaching. "I will repent of what I did and I will tell him, 'I am not worthy to be called your son anymore.'" And so he goes to his father and he repents of what he did and he says, "I am not worthy of being your son anymore." But the father obviously has a completely different reaction. And we can start at this point. None of us are worthy of being his son or his daughter. That's why we begin with repentance. We begin chapter 13 with repentance and the theme seems to continue. None of us are worthy of being his son or his daughter. In fact, Jesus in his encounters with the Pharisees and those who consider themselves righteous, absolutely says, "You think you are worthy of being a son or a daughter, but you're not." In fact, because of the way you think, you are further away from the kingdom of God than the humblest of persons who comes into the banquet, remember, and takes the seat at the foot of the table. You are further away than that individual. And then another banquet we are going to read, where he says, "Go and invite every individual, every poor person, every lost person, every crippled person, because we don't invite people to this banquet that can repay us in any way, because you can't repay the Lord. It is grace. It is a gift. You are undeserving of it." So there's the baseline that we operate and the Father's reaction clearly demonstrates this. If we use the example of Jeff, maybe, right, he's wandering, he's backsliding, he's doing his thing. And the further he goes down that rabbit hole, he thinks, "I am no longer worthy. I am no longer worthy to be called his son. I'm no longer worthy to come to church." There are people outside of the church who have heard of Christianity or maybe went to church as a child and they're thinking right now, "It's been so long and I've done so much and I am not worthy of coming to church. I'm not worthy of hanging out with these folks. I am not worthy of God's love." And this clearly tells us that that is a lie straight from hell because the opposite is true. The exact opposite is true. So it's not just a story about this or that. The richness of this story should speak to your heart about, I won't say your intrinsic value because that can puff you up, but your value to the Lord as one of his image bearers. I don't want you going around saying, "The Lord, in some of these modern Christian songs, the Lord is pursuing me. The Lord wants all these different things." Okay, but you're kind of puffing yourself up. "I am worthy and the Lord is pursuing me." It's kind of like, no, you are unworthy and the Lord is pursuing you anyway because you are a human made in his image. So you can't, that's a little fine line, right? Because the son that is returning thinks that he is absolutely unworthy. And the father, as he returns home, the father says, "You were lost and now you're found. You were blind, but now you see. You wander into the darkness and you've come back to the light." All of those analogies from scripture and images from scriptures can apply here. There is no questioning. "What did you do with my money?" There is no questioning. "What was it like?" There is no questioning. There is just grace and welcoming back because that son is so valuable to that father. The son who stayed with the father, the son who was humbly serving his father, never left his side all of that time. He's the one who develops a problem now. He's the one that gets a little puffed up thinking about how valuable he has been to the father. He doesn't go overboard, and I don't think that's the point of this, like how he deals with Pharisees sometimes and that sort of thing. But we do see that flipping of the script where the older son now feels, "I am worthy of the father. Father should be pursuing me." And scripture warns us about that feeling. And dad says, his father says,

"You've been with me the entire time. Everything that I have is already yours. You're here. You're in the family. You've never left. You've been humble and all that I have is already yours. Your brother, brother in Christ, he made himself lost. He turned his back. He made himself blind. Satan was gripping him. Satan was taking his soul, but he repented and he came back home." So there in touching with the coin and touching with the sheep, there is great value. Heaven will rejoice when not only a soul is saved, of course, teaches that very clearly, but when a soul is ripped out of the hands of the deceiver. When somebody is blind, when somebody is being deceived, when somebody has given in to idols, when all that they measure themselves with is their position, their so-called value, network, their sexuality, whatever the case may be, if all of those things are the things that define you, you're going to be lost. You're going to get lost in the weeds with all of those things because God defines you upon your repentance. And in a long way, that relates back to the very, very beginning when I was talking, and it really is not just another plug, but when I was talking about leadership, when I was talking about investing in the body, everybody is going to be different. Everybody's gifts and talents and abilities. But we are clearly taught that they are to be used. It's not like just a good idea. He teaches us to do that. He tells us that the body of Christ will not be unified. You know how important it is to say, well, all I've ever really done is stood at that door and welcomed strangers who come to church. You don't think that's valuable at all. When you're talking about that one lost soul who stumbles into church town and the first person that that lost soul meets greets them warmly, talks to them, shares their name, finds a seat, whatever the case may be, that is incredibly important. So there is no minimal jobs. We have another thing going on. OK, don't scare me. But there you go. When a lost soul, I always say, we're going to preach the gospel every Sunday here in church town for the sake of those who believe and for the sake of those who do not believe. If anybody that has never heard the gospel stumbles in through these doors, they will have heard the gospel before they left. If we fail in that endeavor, then we have failed. Period. And so every single individual take it as a church family, take it as your family, take it as an individual. And remember, every individual that you are having a conversation with is ordained by God. You may be the only Bible. Yes, somebody else reads. Yeah. Right. Amen.