**LEADERS NOTES**

**Brockley Homegroup Bible Study – March 2024**

**15**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. **2**But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

**3**Then Jesus told them this parable: **4**“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? **5**And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders **6**and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ **7**I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Luke 15

At Brockley, we are starting a mini-series on Luke chapter 15.
March 3rd - The Lost sheep (Jack Warnock and Simon Ladd),
March 17th - The Lost Coin (Sarah-Jane Harknett,)
March 31 - EASTER SUNDAY,
April 14th - The Lost Son (Paul Morris)
April 28th - The Other Lost Son (Simon Ladd)

Q1
What is your best story about losing something and finding it again?

A1
Let people tell their stories. My sister lost a silver bracelet when she was about 7. 40 years later somebody dug it up in their garden. Her inscribed name was still visible and although she had moved house 5 times – they tracked her down.

Q2
What do you think is meant by tax-collectors and sinners in verse 1?

A2
In the Authorised Version of the Bible - it was “publicans and sinners.” But a publican isn’t somebody who runs a pub. Israel was an occupied country. It was divided up into district and an official was put in charge with orders to raise a tax quota. They in turn delegated to local Jews, who were given military backing. These Jewish tax-collectors were despised, not just because they were tax-collectors but because they were collaborators with the enemy and often extortioners too.

In the Old Testament there are very detailed instructions to the priesthood about washings and ceremonial ritual so that they can enter the temple and offer sacrifices. The Pharisees identified 613 of these laws. They argued that all people should keep all these laws – and they labelled ‘sinners’ anybody who didn’t. But for ordinary people, who had to earn a living, this was impossible.

Q3
How does Jesus make this story interesting and engaging? And what should we learn from this about preaching in a way that helps people want to hear?

A3
Let’s be honest. Lots of preachers are boring. Jesus wasn’t. People flocked to hear Jesus preach. Thousands turned up in the middle of nowhere and with no advertising.

Here is a list of how I think this story interests and engages.

1) It’s a story! People love stories. We all curious to know what happens next.
2) It has a happy ending. Even more than a story – we love a story with a happy ending. (Jesus stories didn’t always have happy endings but this one does)
3) The story is about things that ordinary people know. It’s about the everyday happenings in their lives. The village I was brought up in in Wiltshire had a pound. Stray and lost animals were put in the pound and the owner had to pay a small sum to get them back.
4) It has humour. The opening line is suppose one of you has 100 sheep. To own 100 sheep would make you a very rich person. It’s like – suppose you won the lottery, or suppose you are a millionaire. Don’t imagine that people listened to Jesus in silence – this would have immediately drawn heckles “Chance would be a fine thing!”
5) The first word of the story is “suppose”. Jesus is engaging their imagination. He askes them to put themselves into the story.
6) It’s interactive. Do you see the question mark at the end of verse 4. Maybe Jesus paused and got suggestions from the crowd what they would do if they lost a sheep.
7) It’s short. I don’t mind long if it’s interesting – but I get really frustrated when 10 minutes of material is stretched out to fill 30 minutes just for the sake of it.
8) It’s memorable. We could all re-tell this story in our own words.
9) It works at lots of different levels. To the casual – it’s a sweet story that they remember. They might reflect on it later in their life. To the serious, there is lots to think about and some deep instruction about God’s love and it challenges about our attitude to outcasts and outsiders.

Q4
This is a parable – a story to help us understand deeper truth. Make a list of the main characters in the story and then discuss who the different characters are meant to represent.

A4
Let there be some discussion on this. Some of it is not clear cut. Parables generally have a main thrust, they paint a broad picture - and if you push the details too far it’s usually not helpful.

The main characters are (1) the shepherd, (2) the lost sheep (3) the 99 (4) friends and neighbours.

(1)The shepherd represents God and / or Jesus.
(2) The lost sheep represents somebody who is lost – this could be somebody who is living without thought of God, or somebody who used to walk with God but has drifted away.
(3) The 99. This is probably the hardest:

(a)
You could argue that they don’t represent anybody and that their main function in the story is to show the worth of an individual – and that God deals with us personally rather than as a bunch.

(b)
You could also argue that they represent the people who are OK and don’t need to repent (from verse 7)

(c)
My view is that they represent people who think they are OK. In truth, everybody is a sinner, and we all need to repent – so these people are the self-satisfied, self-righteous people, like the Pharisees and teachers of the law who think they are doing fine. But don’t worry too much about this – its not the main point.

(4)
Friends and neighbours don’t really represent any specific group. They stand in the story for anybody who is pleased to see the lost sheep get safely home. This includes the angels in heaven and any tender-hearted person on earth. More challengingly, one cannot imagine that the Pharisees and teachers of the law would have joined this party

Q5
How does the shepherd react when he realizes one sheep is missing? What does the shepherd's actions tell us about God's attitude towards those who are lost?

A5
The shepherd reacts with urgency and determination. The story shows us that God cares about us as individuals. The story shows how highly God values us. The initiative in this story and the next one (The Lost Coin), is with God. He is doing the searching. He is looking for us. All of this shows God’s love for us.

Q6
Which character do you see yourself as in this story?

A6
This is deeper than it first appears. Give people a while to consider and share.

The character that Jesus asks us to be is the shepherd. “Suppose one of you has 100 sheep”

I would argue, that we can relate to all character in this story

Shepherd - we have all lost something and searched to get is back
Sheep - we have all felt lost
Neighbour - we have all shared the joy of something getting found, or of seeing somebody get on a better track in life.
The 99 – and perhaps, we all have a bit of Pharisee in us too.

Q7 What does the sheep have to do in this story to be saved?

A7
The answer is bleat. This shepherd knows his sheep. He knows which one is missing. He goes out searching and calls out for the sheep – and the sheep hearing the shepherds voice would answer back with a bleat.

To be saved we only have to call out. (Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, ROMANS 10:13) Jesus does the searching and the rescuing. The sheep doesn’t even have to walk home! The shepherd carries it.

Q8
How much joy is there in this story and the other lost and found stories in Luke 15. How much joy did you see in the church of your upbringing? Do they match up?

A8
There is lots of joy in this story. The joy of the Shepherd when he finds the sheep. The joy of the sheep at being found. The joy of the party when the shepherd gathers his friends and neighbours together (v6) and there is joy in heaven (v7)

There is more joy in the lost coin. And there is music and dancing in The Lost Sons

There wasn’t much joy in the chapel of my youth. Dancing in church was unthinkable – dancing outside of church was heavily frowned upon. Sundays were all about what you couldn’t do. No football. No games. No pop music. No television. ( Even as a child I thought it was hypocritical to buy a newspaper or milk on a Monday – because you had made people work on a Sunday to get it ready for you) Church services were long and tedious (not even a children’s talk) and the highlight was being given a boiled sweet and trying to unwrap it without making any noise.

Q9
What should churches (and our church, and us) be learning from this story?

A9
When a young William Booth rounded up the poor children of Nottingham and took them to church – they did not get a warm welcome. They were children, they were poor, they smelled. They were told to go and sit right at the back. The more William Booth thought about this the more angry he became. Next week he got there early, marched the children to front and occupied all the best seats and refused to move.

Remember that this story is told in response to the criticism that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. The Pharisees judged and criticised sinners and tried to keep their distance from them.

We, and our church, needs to be like Jesus, not the Pharisees.

Here are some things we should maybe learn.
01) Be interesting.
02) Be short.
03) Be relevant.
04) Give a warm welcome to all.
05) Show love.
06) Everybody has value.
07) Treat everybody as an individual.
08) There is no dress code.
09) People don’t have to fit in with us, we will adapt to fit in with them.
10) Cut out the judging and critical spirit.
11) We should reflect a God that loves people and wants the best for them.
12) Show some joy.

**For Further reflection:**
What if this story started, suppose you have 1000 sheep, or a million, or a billion. There is no number when the one missing sheep becomes an acceptable loss.

**The Hound of Heaven**
There is a poem, that needs updating now, by Francis Thompson written in 1890 called The Hound of Heaven. It’s a long poem and speaks Francis continued rejection of God – but of God’s love pursuing him like a hound.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him,*

But he is always aware of God’s love, padding along behind him

*Still with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
Came on the following Feet,*