

Teaching Reconciliation

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation is central to the life of every local Catholic community, especially at times like Lent and Advent.
- When teaching or preaching about this Sacrament, we commonly focus on the cluster of parables found in Luke 15: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Lost (Prodigal) Son.
- How can we breathe fresh life into these teachings to prevent over-familiarity for both teachers and listeners? Sometimes one good, fresh insight can make all the difference. This series of Reconciliation handouts offers just that: brief, accessible and engaging teaching and discussion points.
- Authored by Teresa Pirola and Jack Driscoll CFC, drawing largely on the work of Kenneth Bailey. Illustrations: Francine Pirola. © The Story Source 2008.
- Kenneth Bailey has spent forty years living and teaching New Testament in the Middle East, close to the land, the languages and the people. His work offers important insights into Middle Eastern village life from which we can extrapolate to form a view of conditions at the time of Jesus. See Kenneth Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*. Rev. ed. (Illinois: IVP Books, 2005).



Reconciliation

Read Luke 15:1-7
Parable of the Lost Sheep

Let us focus now on verse 5:

When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. (NRSV)

Picture this:

- How long did the shepherd search? The parable doesn't say. But any Lebanese or Palestinian peasant will tell you that it may take a day or more of climbing over rugged wilderness to find a lost sheep. (Bailey, 31)
- This is not a little lamb to be cuddled in his arms, but a heavy grown sheep to be hoisted on both shoulders as the shepherd begins the back-breaking journey home.
- The sheep is probably disoriented, shocked, perhaps wounded. The shepherd ties the animal's four feet around his neck to give him control of the animal and leave one hand free for climbing.

Imagine this:

- A bruised, bloodied, exhausted and desperately thirsty shepherd, who pays a high price to rescue one lost sheep which is powerless to save itself.

Hear this:

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...I will feed them with justice. (Ezek: 34:11,16. NRSV)

Shepherd imagery has powerful, ancient biblical symbolism. For the Jews then (and for Christians now) the good shepherd was (is) an image of the messianic age, the Day of the Lord, when God definitively brings about salvation.

Ponder this:

Profound themes can be identified in this single verse; e.g.,

- Reconciliation requires courageous commitment to a difficult process.
- When the lost one is found, restoration has just begun.
- God searches out the sinner. Repentance doesn't earn our rescue. The sinner accepts being found,
- In searching out the 'lost,' Jesus can be seen against the backdrop of the good shepherd of Ezekiel 34.