

Speaking to the soul



Every single person

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?” Matthew 18:12

I suspect that few of us have had experience of being shepherds. However, many of us will have memories of lost

pets. I recall the time when our cat Tabitha went missing for days on end. We walked the streets and called out her name, desperately hoping to hear her miaow, but there was no response. Then one day as I was looking down our garden, I saw this poor thin creature dragging herself limply towards the house. She had a broken femur and had presumably been involved in a road accident. To say that we were delighted would hardly begin to describe how it felt to have her back, and over the coming weeks she made a complete recovery. She was just one little cat, but the news of her return home was a moment of incredible joy for our family.

I can therefore begin to understand the joy of the shepherd who found his sheep. It might surprise us that he noticed he was one sheep short amid the large flock, but he knew those sheep well. He knew their personalities. He knew the ones that were always out in front and he knew the stragglers. He knew the sick ones and those who were always vigorous and strong. He knew so much because he loved them. He risked his life every day as he cared for them in the harsh terrain, and as he protected them from sheep rustlers and wild animals. Every single sheep mattered.

In our local churches, we need to continually remind ourselves of the importance of every single person. We will be close to some people and understand them well. Others will be very different from us, and we might find some people quite awkward. But every single person matters intensely, and if they wander away, we need to long for their return and do all that we can to make it happen. And then, whoever they are, if they return, there should be a great celebration.

QUESTION

In what way does this parable challenge the life of your church?

PRAYER

Loving God, help me to treasure every single person in the way that you treasure me. Amen

Photograph - near Slemish, County Antrim

