On September 26, 2018 (about two and a half weeks ago) the US Marshall’s Service conducted a sweep of Wayne County Michigan to locate and identify as many missing children as they could. In one day, they safely recovered 123 missing children only a few hours away from where we sit right now.

As a parent, I can’t imagine what it would be like to have a child missing. To not know where your child was. To not know if they were okay. To not even know in some cases if they were still alive. The sad part is that there are still 178 open missing children cases in Wayne county alone. The operation was a huge success, but they didn’t even find half the kids they were looking for.

Those children were lost. Some were taken, it sounds like some were runaways, one was homeless, but all of them were lost. Those kids were living in dangerous and terrible conditions because they were not where they were meant to be. They had left or been taken away from the homes where they belonged. Those children faced the reality of being lost in a way that affected their lives every day. They were lost in a physical sense. They weren’t in their homes, they weren’t with their families.

What those kids faced in a physical sense, every one of us faces in a spiritual sense. When we think of something or someone being lost we might think of having to stop to ask for directions. Not being able to find something that we lost down the couch cushions. For those of you with young children, something that was last seen in the hands of your kids and is now mysteriously gone, never to be seen again.

When the Bible speaks of being lost, it is far more serious than that. The Bible teaches that human beings are eternal beings, made in the image of God, given life with the breath of God himself. So, when this life is over, those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus will spend eternity with God. Those who have not, those who are still lost, will spend eternity separated from God. That is the worst fate anyone could ever face.

Greek word that is used for this idea of being lost is the word άπόλλυμι (apollymi) which means to ruin, to utterly destroy, to perish, to kill, to put an end to something, or to be lost. It is not just something that has been misplaced. This kind of lostness is a serious affair. It is to be disconnected from the God who gives us life. To be cut off from the chance of eternal life. This kind of lostness doesn’t just affect our time here on this earth. It affects our whole eternity.

The song Reckless Love that inspired this sermon series is so powerful because it recognizes that we are all lost without the reckless love of God. It speaks of how we were the enemies of God, and yet because of God’s overwhelming, never ending, reckless love for us, he fought for us. He paid it all for us. He chased us down until we were found. Until we were no longer lost.

The picture that song uses to describe how God comes after us is the picture of God leaving the 99 to come after us. Most of you probably recognize that reference as a parable that Jesus told in Luke 15. I want to dig a little deeper into that story today so we can see a little better picture of what it means for God to come after us lost sheep.

**Luke 15:1–6 ESV — 1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” **3** So he told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’

The context of this story is that the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling because Jesus spent time with people they would never dream of being around. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and other people that were the lowlifes in their culture.

Jesus spent time with those people on a regular basis. In Luke 15, we see that those people begin to draw near to Jesus. Those same people would probably never go near a Pharisee or another rabbi. But they knew they were safe around Jesus. They knew that Jesus was the one who had what they needed.

The Pharisees and leaders of the Jews criticized Jesus every chance they got for spending time with people like that. It was in response to that criticism that Jesus told this parable, and a few others that come right after this to show us what God thinks of those who are lost. To show what God is willing to do to find and save those who are lost.

Jesus gives us a picture here of a Shepherd who found that he had a sheep missing and went off looking for it. To really understand what Jesus is getting at here, we need to step into the sandals of a shepherd for a bit.

A hundred sheep may sound like a lot, but it was actually pretty average flock for Jesus’ time. The fact that this shepherd is alone with his sheep probably meant that the flock belonged to him. These sheep were his livelihood.

During the day, shepherds would watch over their flocks and protect them while they grazed out in the wilderness. They would lead them to new feeding grounds or to safe watering areas. But the real danger came when the sun went down. That’s when the predators or even thieves would come to threaten the flocks. Shepherds had to be on guard to make sure their flock made it through the night.

Before nightfall, they would take their sheep to an enclosed pen that was usually made of stone walls with thorns around the top to keep predators out. The shepherd himself would sleep in the opening of the gate so that if there were any danger it would have to come through him first.

Being a shepherd was a job that required a lot of self-sacrifice and willingness to put yourself in danger for the good of the sheep. A shepherd did that on a nightly basis. As the sheep were filing into the enclosure just before nightfall, the shepherd would count them to make sure that they were all there. That’s when the shepherd in Jesus’ parable realized that one of his sheep was missing.

David was a shepherd for his father’s sheep when he was just a young boy. He faced all kinds of dangers that would scare most of us to death. When King Saul told him he was too young to face Goliath, David said this:

**1 Samuel 17:34–37 ESV — 34** …“Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, **35** I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. **36** Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” **37** And David said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!”

This young man fought off lions and bears with a sling and a staff to protect his flock. When a predator had taken a sheep from his flock, he chased down lions and bears to get his lamb back. That was the kind of danger that shepherds faced every day.

When they laid down for the night in the opening of the gate those same predators would be the ones coming for his sheep. It was the job of shepherds to make sure that the flock stayed safe, even if that meant that they faced pretty extreme danger themselves

Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd in John 10, and he says that the Good Shepherd lays his life down for his sheep. That was true of the shepherds of his day. The good shepherds were the ones who risked their own lives to protect the sheep. That was true of Jesus as well.

When we were the lost ones, when we were the ones who needed saving out of the clutches of Satan and out of the clutches of our own sin it was Jesus that came after us. He took on something far more dangerous than a lion or a bear. It was Jesus that risked it all to make sure that we were safe. It was Jesus that gave his life so that we could be saved.

Finding the sheep that was lost was important to this shepherd. It was important enough that he was willing to risk his own life to go after it in the dark with predators all around. But that was not the only risk he was taking.

This shepherd who had 100 sheep left the 99 who were safe and went off to find the one who was lost. Maybe that sounds like too much of a risk to you, maybe you would never leave the 99 who were safe for the one sheep who was lost. What if something worse happened to the 99 sheep, and you ended up losing a lot more than just one sheep.

Leaving 99 sheep who are safely tucked away in their shelter for the night to go after one sheep who was dumb enough to wander off by itself seems like a bad idea. It seems like the safe thing to do is to keep the 99 safe so you don’t lose any more sheep, and just chalk that one up to experience.

Here’s the thing: God’s love for us is so powerful that he can’t bear it when one of us is lost. His powerful, all-consuming love for us drives him to bring us safely home. Even if that means he has to take incredible risk to do so, he will still come after us. I saw a quote the other day that said, “Jesus leaving the 99 to find one seems illogical, irrational, and senseless…until that one is you.

And that’s the point. I was not one of the 99 safely in the pen. Neither were you. If you are safely in the flock of God now, it’s only because Jesus chased you down, fought till you were found, and left the 99 to come after you. Every one of us either is the lost sheep right now, or we were at some point in our past. It seems pretty reckless of Jesus to come after us the way that he did, to risk all that he did for us even when he knew that a vast amount of people would choose to reject his love, his grace, his hope, and would choose to put their faith in something other than Jesus.

God’s love is reckless because he loved us with this great love and then left it up to us to respond. He pursued us. He chased after us. He did all that he did for us because he wanted us to choose to love him.

God didn’t want us to be robots who would love him simply because they were programmed to do so. That kind of love isn’t really love. To truly love God, it would have to be our choice. God loved us and wanted us to love him back of our own free will. So that’s exactly what he gave us. In doing so, he risked that we would totally reject his love.

God’s grace is reckless because, again, he risked that we would choose not to accept his grace. God sent his son to die on the cross for us while we were still sinners and he risked that we would scorn his sacrifice. He risked that we would look at what he did for us and still turn our backs on him.

God didn’t just risk loving us. In order to give us his grace he had to pay for it. We had to be bought with a price. And the price for the grace God gives freely to us was that he had to send his son here to die a brutal death. Jesus died so that we wouldn’t have to. He took our penalty upon himself. God gave up an incredible amount and left it in our hands whether we would accept that grace or throw his sacrifice right back in his face.

The only thing God requires of us is faith. God risked we would choose not to put our faith in him. He risked we would put our faith in the temporary things the world has to offer instead of what he offers that is eternal. He risked that our faith would be an atrophied version of what he meant it to be. That we would not do the kinds of things God meant for us to do with our faith.

The hope God offers to us is similar. We have a sure and certain hope that God will do what he said he will do. That Jesus is returning and when he does we who have put our faith and trust in him will live with him for all eternity. But hope is something that we cannot see yet, even though it is sure to come. God risked that we would get tired of waiting for the unseen and instead put our hope in the things of this world that we can see and hear and feel. He risked that we would stop waiting for the intangible and instead put our hope in the things that are right here in front of us.

God has given us his overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love. He has given up and risked so much so that we would know that love. He offers us love, grace, and hope. He requires only faith. But sometimes it’s hard to know how we should respond. How are we supposed to respond to the kind of risks God took for us? How are we supposed to respond to his reckless love and grace?

1. Recognize God’s love for you

We need to start seeing ourselves the way God sees us. God’s love is intimate, personal, powerful, reckless. God doesn’t just love mankind, he loves each one of us personally. He knows your name. He knows every hair on your head. He knows your every need. And most importantly he loves you with that deep and intimate love that only the Creator can fully know.

God’s love for us is a powerful and personal thing. We have to realize that God’s thinks far more of us than we often do of ourselves. Who are we to put ourselves down when the God of the universe thought we were worth enough to send his son to die for us?

Sometimes we don’t feel like we’re important enough for God to come after us like that. Sometimes we feel like we’re not worthy of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and you know what, we’re not. That’s the whole idea behind grace, that God came after us and extended grace to us, even while we were still sinners, even while we were still the enemies of God.

We don’t deserve grace, and yet God came after us anyway. We don’t deserve forgiveness, and yet Jesus gave his life to forgive us anyway. Even when we stray away from God, even when we become lost sheep, God still leaves the 99 behind to come after us, to come and find us. Not because we deserve it but because he loves us that much.

1. Remember God’s grace is a free gift

We need to remember that we don’t have to earn God’s love or his grace. The reality is that we never could. Paul says in Romans 11 that we are… **Romans 11:5–6 ESV — 5** … chosen by grace. **6** But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

So many people feel like they have to earn the grace of God. They feel like they have to somehow be good enough before they accept the gift of his grace. That they have to clean up their act before they even walk in the doors of the church.

That’s not how God’s grace works. His love and his grace are free gifts that he gives because he loves us so deeply. He gives them to people who are broken and hurting so that he can justify and redeem broken people. His grace is a free gift. We couldn’t earn it, we don’t deserve it. Still he gave himself away. He gave himself away for me. He gave himself away for you.

1. Have the faith to do something for God

God took an incredible amount of risk in loving us while we were still his enemies. Putting our faith in him requires some risk on our part as well. Rod taught us a couple of weeks ago that faith is not static. It doesn’t sit still. It doesn’t play it safe. We tend to stay in our comfort zones and play it safe. We don’t like to change and we don’t like to take risks.

Beth and I been reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* with the kids before bed. There’s a part in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that I absolutely love. Susan had just found out that this Aslan they had been talking about was a lion and suddenly she was afraid. She said, “Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. Her host, Mr. Beaver, said, “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

Putting our faith in God is risky because our God is the Lion, the Lion of Judah. He is not a safe God, but he is always a good God. He’s the King, I tell you. That means he can accomplish things that we don’t have the ability to do for ourselves. He can do big, audacious things as long as we put our faith in him.

1. Our hope in Christ is a promise that will never fail

Our hope as followers of Jesus is that we will enjoy eternal life with Jesus one day when he returns to take us to a place that he has been preparing for us. When people hear the word hope, they have a tendency to think that what we are hoping for might not happen. I’ve run into Christians who had a problem with the word hope being used in Scripture. They were afraid it sounded like we weren’t sure Jesus’s promises would actually happen. The problem wasn’t the word the Bible used. It was that they didn’t understand what the Bible meant when it talked about hope.

The biblical idea of hope is not an uncertain thing. The hope the Bible speaks of is a sure and certain future that we are promised by a God who always keeps his promises. The New Testament speaks of Jesus as our hope over and over again. We never have to worry that what Jesus promised might not happen. The truth of his resurrection secures our hope and assures us that God will do what he said he will do.

1. Most importantly, we have to accept the gift of God’s love and grace.

God’s love and grace are gifts that are freely given to us, paid for by the blood of Jesus. The thing about a gift is that we have to receive it. God is offering us the one thing we need more than anything else. If we accept the gifts of God’s love and grace then we will have the hope that we just talked about. We will have a hope that nothing can take away from us.

But as recipients of those free gifts of love and grace, we also have the option to reject them. That’s the big risk that God took in giving us free will. That is why God’s love for us is so reckless. He offers us the redemption and eternal life that we so desperately need, but we can still choose not to take it.

If we choose not to accept God’s free gifts of love and grace, then we will remain lost. Not just misplaced for a time. Not just off course and in need of directions. This kind of lostness is the kind that utterly destroys. The kind of lostness that keeps us separated from God for all eternity. There is no way that we can make ourselves ‘found’ on our own.

But thankfully we have a God who pursues every one of us to make sure that we do not remain lost. We have a God who leaves the 99 behind to go in pursuit of the one sheep who has gone astray. I am that lost sheep that God pursued so relentlessly. You are that lost sheep that God risked everything to find. We are all lost without the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God. But thank God he chases us down. He fights ‘til we are found. He leaves the 99. He did that for me and he does that for you. Because he loves us that much.

I’m going to ask the worship team to come back up now. While they are playing this next song, you have an opportunity to make a respond to the reckless love of God.

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior, then you are still a lost sheep. Jesus has been pursuing you, chasing you down so that you can be found. If you are waiting to make that decision, don’t put it off any longer. It’s the most important decision you’ll ever make.

If you are a believer in Jesus and you have never been baptized before, we invite you to come and do that today as well.

If you are looking for a church family to belong to, we would love to have you come and be a part of Agape. If you have questions or concerns about any of those things, just come talk to me, or Rod, or one of our elders.