

18th February 2021

LOST

“Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

Bible, Luke 15:6

When I heard the words above from the scripture lesson in our on-line worship last Sunday, I was reminded of the source of perhaps the greatest hymn to be based on Jesus' Parable of the Lost Sheep – the 19th century hymn by Elizabeth Cecelia Douglas Clephane, *There were ninety and nine*.

One afternoon in 1874, the American evangelists, Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, were on a train from Glasgow to Edinburgh to begin their second mission in the Scottish capital. Sankey's eyes caught some lines from his newspaper, in an unobtrusive corner of a page:

*There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold,
but one was out on the hills away, far off from the gates of gold –
away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd's care.*

*“Lord, thou hast here thy ninety and nine; are they not enough for thee?”
But the Shepherd made answer: “This of mine has wandered away from me,
and although the road be rough and steep, I go to the desert to find my sheep.”*

During the subsequent rally, Moody was moved to ask Sankey if he had a solo he could sing with which to close the event, to capture the mood and purpose of the occasion. Sankey remembered the words he had read in the newspaper, and, in a moment of inspiration, set them to an old, Southern States, spiritual tune, *A wonderful stream is this river of mine*. Moody and Sankey were to report later that they could not count the souls that had been moved, and the lives that had been changed, by the powerful message of this spontaneously created hymn.

The words had been written by Elizabeth Clephane, a daughter of Andrew Clephane of Carlogie, the Sheriff Principal of Fife and Kinross. In her book on female hymn writers, Mrs E R Pitman says, “Miss Clephane, by this hymn, has set in motion a sermon on the love of Christ which will never die as long as the English tongue is spoken. [It may never be known] how many wandering sheep have been brought home by its means.”

Ninety-nine safe and well, with one that's lost? That's our task, right there, to go into the desert and bring that wandering sheep home safely.

A prayer for today

Lord, sometimes I get lost too. Can someone help me to find my way home? Amen

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