

Luke 15:1-7

Runaway Bunny Christmas Eve Homily

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Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother, "I am running away."

"If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you. For you are my little bunny."

These are the opening words of *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown. We have a lot of children's books in our house right now but there's **something special** about this book. *Runaway Bunny* has never gone out of print since it was first published in 1942.¹ Families still love reading it and passing it along today.

Maybe you're thinking, "You got your **Holidays wrong!** It's **not Easter.**" Well, I actually think *The Runaway Bunny* tells us about **Christmas**. I think we love this book because it **whispers a greater story**, the story of **God pursuing us because he loves us**. The story of the Bible and of Christmas is the story of **us running away from God** and **God running after us**.

"If you run after me," said the little bunny, "I will become a fish in a trout stream and I will swim away from you."

"If you become a fish in a trout stream," said his mother, "I will become a fisherman and I will fish for you."

The little bunny is **strong** and **independent**; but **his idea of freedom is actually captivity**. Little bunnies **don't make good swimmers**. We're **kind of like** that little bunny, aren't we? We run to things that we **think will make us happy** but they don't. That's how it's been since **Adam** and **Eve disobeyed God** and ate from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:17). They **wanted freedom** but instead they got **captivity**. Their sin introduced **brokenness** and **mistrust** into our world. So what did they do in the garden? They **ran away**. They tried to **hide**.

Genesis 3:8 (NIV) Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Do you know what it's like to **be so wrong** you just want to hide? Hi an **emotion**, hide a **memory**, hide a **thing you did** or **said**? Hide from your **parents**, your **spouse**, your **friends**, your **boss**, your **God**? One of my **earliest memories** is me running away and hiding from my **brothers** because I had done something wrong (I think I'd lied). We all hide because we all **feel shame**, but God **doesn't want to leave us** in our shame. When Adam and Eve were hiding, **do you know** what God was doing? **He was searching**.

Genesis 3:9 (NIV) But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

God knew exactly where they were as he walked through **his garden**, but still he called out, "Where are you?" Why would he do that? Why not just **appear** exactly where they were hiding and surprise them?! Because **our God is a God who cares enough to come after us** (Rom 3:11). Our God is a God who **loves us enough** to find us. Even now, God is offering Adam and Eve an **opportunity to come** to him, but instead they hide. But **you** don't have to hide.

Where are you Adam? Where are you Eve? **How** would you **answer that question?** **Where are you?** Are you walking with God in the garden or are you **hiding behind the trees?** **What** do you hide behind? Do you hide behind **good deeds?** Good **parenting?** Good **grades?** Good **fitness?** A good **relationship?** Good **work?** A good **career?** Good **morality?** Being a **good person?** **Hiding behind something that is good is still hiding.** What thing is **in-between you and God?** Don't let it keep you **back** from him.

The runaway bunny has **good ideas**; he has really **great** ideas. He doesn't want to **do bad**. He wants to do good. He wants to **become a mountain!**

“If you become a fisherman,” said the little bunny, “I will become a rock on the mountain, high above you.”

“If you become a rock on the mountain high above me,” said his mother, “I will be a mountain climber, and I will climb to where you are.”

The little bunny wants to become a **mountain high above his mother**. He wants to **surpass** her. He wants to be **in charge**. That's exactly what Adam and Eve wanted and what we want **when we do life our way** instead of God's way. We want to **rule over God**; we want to be the **ones in charge**. The mommy bunny doesn't say, “**Fine, have it your way**” and leave her bunny to his mountain; instead, she goes after him. And that's the story of the Bible, **God doesn't leave us** to ourselves but comes after **you and me**. The **Psalmist** David describes a God who **pursues us no matter where we go**.

Psalm 139:7-10 (NIV)

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

10 even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

There's **nowhere** we can **get away from God**. You can't be **so high** and **so good** that you don't need God. But neither can you be **so bad** and **so low** that God **can't forgive you**. There's **no location, activity, memory, or action** we can hide behind where God can't **rescue** us.

The little bunny tries to hide in a **hidden garden**, a place with lots of hiding spots for a little bunny, but his mother becomes a **gardener** and finds him.

The little bunny tries to become a **bird** and **fly away** from his mother, but she becomes the **tree** he calls home.

The little bunny tries to become a **sailboat** and **sail** away from his mother, but she becomes the **wind** and brings him home.

The little bunny tries to run away and **join a circus** as a **flying trapeze artist**, but his mother becomes a **tightrope walker** and walks **across the air** to him.

If this book was about anyone else but this little bunny's **mother** or **father**, it would be **really creepy**, but it's not. It's about his mother. She's pursuing him not out of **anger** or wanting to **take something** from him, but out of **love**. She loves him enough to **become what he needs**; and we have a God who **has become** what

we need **to rescue us**. I'm going to **read a passage** from the Bible that describes **God becoming exactly who we need, a small baby boy named Jesus**.

Luke 1:30-35 (NIV)

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

What we need is for God to come to us just like he did in the garden. He needs to come and walk among us and that's exactly what he did **through Jesus**. Jesus **lived** and **breathed** and **experienced life** just like you and me. Jesus had to **wake-up on Mondays** too. But the mysterious thing about Jesus is that **he is** also the **one true God**. That means through Jesus God is **feeling** and **experiencing** the things **we feel** and **experience, except he doesn't sin**. He **handles** life the way it should be handled. Jesus, because he's God, but also man, can speak to his **Heavenly Father** on **our behalf**. He can **make amends** for us.

He can **make amends** because he **shed his own blood** on the **cross** to **pay for our sins**. That **sounds old fashioned**, doesn't it? Why would a **loving God require his Son to die**? Because he's also a **just God**. The only way God can forgive our sins and love us is by paying the penalty for sin himself—and that's what God did in Jesus. Jesus is the God who **took our penalty upon himself** so that **we might live**. He's a God who wants to **rescue anyone who is lost**.

Jesus told a parable of a **lost sheep** during his ministry. He told it because people were **complaining** that he **spent time with the wrong kind of people**, the **outcasts** and **sinner**s, the **misfits** (Luke 15:1-2). **Our God loves** the outcasts, sinners, and misfits.

Luke 15:3-7 (NIV)

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.

A shepherd loses one of his sheep and then goes far and wide to find it. That's what God has done for us.

Then he calls his friends and neighbors 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.

If you're **out there doing your own thing**, maybe a really great thing, but you're **running away** from God, **Jesus is the good shepherd who is coming after you**. He is not content to let you **perish** apart from him. He does **call you to repentance**, to **turn away** from the **sin** that hurts you and **believe in him**, but he does so **out of love**.

"If you become a tightrope walker and walk across the air," said the bunny, "I will become a little boy and run into a house."

"If you become a little boy and run into a house," said the mother bunny, "I will become your mother and catch you in my arms and hug you."

Are you a **runaway bunny**? It takes **courage** to **admit** you're a **bunny**. It takes courage to admit you got a **sin problem** and **can't make it right** but **God can through Jesus**. It takes courage to **stop running** and and **come home**.

“Shucks,” said the bunny, “I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny.” And so he did. “Have a carrot,” said the mother bunny.

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Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

¹ Accessed Dec 17, 2019. https://www.amazon.com/Runaway-Bunny-Margaret-Wise-Brown/dp/0061074292/ref=zg_bs_2859_12?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=RKM4NQCZCZ0GQMCMYKXS