

Lost but Always Found

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Pentecost 14, Luke 15:1-10

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness 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 and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

All of us are lost, even though we try hard to do right and be good people. There is a sense of emptiness or wondering what's it all about. God rejoices over the righteous and the lost and then throws a huge party in heaven whenever we turn to God.ⁱ

Ever lost something that was really precious to you? Regularly, Kathy in the office and I get calls to look for something that a worshipper has lost. Sometimes they are ordinary items like a water bottle, or t-shirt. Other times, people lose really valuable items like a hearing aid. Just this week, I found a beautiful earring on the floor, with diamonds and a purple stone in it. If that sounds like yours, ladies, find me after worship!

But...have we ever felt lost? I mean lost in our spirits? Lost in our heads; without knowing where to turn or find help? A pervasive emptiness in the midst of the busyness?

This week I was busy juggling work and a big project at my house. I was going down the list to make certain everything got done. Had I finished this and that?

Had I purchased the right items for the home project? Did I meet the deadline for this meeting?

On Friday night, I realized something. So concerned about the final outcomes of both work and home, I noticed I'd been focused on the wrong things. Had I really stopped to see you, the people God has called me to serve behind the to-do list? Had I asked God, to make my home a sanctuary of Him and the Holy Spirit, rather than simply a place where projects get done? None of my work or the house projects were wrong. But I lost what was most important. Have you ever done that?

At the opening of Jesus' parable, it says that the tax collectors and sinners were eating with Jesus; the religious leaders were grumbling about it. Eating a meal, wasn't like it is today; sit down for 20 minutes. The religious leaders were upset that Jesus was eating a meal with these people who were somehow 'less than'. They get lost in behaviors rather than relationships.

Jesus appears to frame the story between 'sinners' and 'righteous' people. But in Luke, sinners are those whose habit of sinning is so constant, so habitual that everyone knows it. They sin again and again and again. The word righteous doesn't mean perfect. Nor does it mean self-righteous. It means decent people who try their best to do what is right. Isn't that you and me? Each day, we get up and try to do our best. Do the 'right' thing. Don't make bad choices. Don't purposely 'sin' against God and neighbor.

In addition, consciously or unconsciously, we might think the bad people, the real 'sinners' are those whose actions we deem way below the par of acceptable behavior. They are the lost ones. People who hurt their partners. People who don't seem to have a moral compass. People who...fill in your own blank.

"Which one of you?" Jesus asks, implying that everyone – both the sinners and the righteous - come under that question. Which one of you would leave 99 to find one lost sheep? Or sweep the house until finding that one coin which is 1/10 of your income?

But like so many of Jesus' stories there is often a weird wrinkle. Who in their right mind would leave 99 sheep to the fate of predators? Then throw a party because of one 'baaaad' sheep? Who in their right mind would find all that money and then turn around and spend it on party favors, meatballs, chips n dips? No one!

But this is what God does! God throws a party for the lost. Every angel in heaven is jubilant! Every angel gets a tooter and confetti and makes their voices squeaky on helium from the balloons. It's a hoot! There is music and laughter and joy! There are smiles and hugs and dancing! It's a party to end all parties when the lost are found.

(pause) You know you're lost, right? You know you're lost, right? You and I are more like those religious leaders than we'd like to admit. We often work so hard at behaving correctly, doing the right thing for ourselves, or our parents or our children, that we can't see the forest for the trees.

Hallmark romance movies show the man so focused on his career that he doesn't know he's missing out on love. Lost.

Parents who work so hard to get their children onto the right sports team and succeed miss out on helping them enjoy sports for the simple love of playing. Lost.

Teenagers who try so hard to be accepted and then get swayed by people they ought not trust. Lost.

Retirees might have a large house and boats and cars, but no one to enjoy them with. Lost.

There's nothing wrong with climbing the corporate ladder or cheering your talented kids on or having a comfortable retirement account. There's nothing wrong with to-do lists or showing up for worship or making sure the kids have clean clothes and dinner is on the table. Yet, those things don't define who God truly longs for us to be. We are so much more than what we do!

God longs for us to be in relationship with God. Come home. Turn around. Have a renewed understanding of God's grace. Which is why when we realize God's love and mercy again, God sends out the party invites to all the angels!

'Woo, hoo! Ruth Ann remembered who she is, child of God first and pastor second.' Found!

'Yippee! Fred heard my still small voice to stop and pray today for the person who hurt him.' Found!

‘Fabulous! Karen had fun this week with her friends who remind her she is loved!’
Found!

‘Incredible! Joey really heard the pastor say God loved him! God loved him!’
Found.

You see, people of God, God is so crazy about us, that God would do a crazy thing of losing God’s only Son to find all of humanity. God is so much in love with us, that God invites all of heaven to a celebratory party when any one of us realize we are more than what we do. God will crawl over every hill and valley, sweep until God’s arms are exhausted to lead us back home to grace and sweep us into unending love.

We don’t have to be lost...when we are already found. Now let’s party! Amen.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/lost> Credit for the idea and some language for this sermon goes to Rev Dr David Lose’s excellent commentary.