

Fourth Sunday Lent 2019 – C
Joshua 5.9a, 10-12///2 Corinthians 5.17-21///Luke 15.1-3,11-32

→the parables of the lost sheep...the lost coin...and the story we just heard...the lost son make up the entire 15th chapter of Luke's gospel account...

→in fact this chapter is often referred to as the “lost and found” chapter of the New Testament...because in it.....we come to the very heart of the Gospel message...

[and]...today we hear once again about the primary theme of our Lord's ministry..... the crown jewel of all the parables.....*PAUSE*

→at its core...the DNA of this Gospel passage is God refusing to abandon us when we are lost

→and the actions and words of Jesus illustrate this point on almost every page of the scripture

→whether it is “sinners” whom Jesus “welcomes” and “eats” with or those he invites to follow him...////at every turn....Jesus tells the **lost** that they have been **found**

→and today's story is no different.

→the parable of the prodigal son...we all know too well

→the younger son asks his father for his inheritance

→the father divests himself of his fortune, gives to his two sons all that he has

→the younger son goes to a far country and there wastes everything

→hungry and destitute...he finds meager employment until he swallows his ego, and decides to return home and repent before his father

→as he nears home...his father sees him in the distance...runs to him and throws his arms around him...calling for a new robe and ring for his finger...for it is time to celebrate his son being found

→meanwhile the older brother becomes aware of the celebration and refuses to join in

→and to make matters worse he confronts his father about all this hoopla...to which the father says....

“you are with me always and everything I have is yours...but we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and is now alive...he was lost and now has been found!”

→that’s the story we remember...the story that we never grow tired hearing and the story that begs a question that I have often pondered

→why is it that people when given the choice of being faced with any deficit or loss of any kind.....be it death, employment...theft...love ...relationship...trust....

→you name it...tend to narrow their focus and pain on what they have lost?

i.o.w. why do we seem to pitch our tent in the land of the lost rather than finding a way to live in the land of the found?

I have often wondered why it is.....that whenever we are lost....at those times when we need God, the church, one another **the most**....that so many of us seem to stay lost instead of wanting to be found.

→by that I mean....have you ever noticed that when something happens major in our lives....whether it be a death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the breakdown of a

relationship...[those times when we seem to be lost]...that many of us...like the son in the parable...stay away from God....stay away from faith....stay away from being found.

→I have often been fascinated by how many people ...leave the church....stop practicing their faith...walk away from God.....whenever something like that happens....

And in doing so they remain lost....misplaced....baffled and adrift

PAUSE

→it is similar to a conversation I have had so many times with so many people over the years....

→they say to me...I don't go to Church because its filled with a bunch of hypocrites....you and me.....who for an hour a week...leave all that ails us, and bothers us, and frustrates us outside and come together to pray to God...

→and then, as hard as we might try....within a few hours from now we find ourselves acting as if nothing has changed or is different...

→and my response to those people is...that they are absolutely right...the church is filled with a bunch of hypocrites.....people who are lost...and frustrated...and angry...and sinful...coming together, even if for only an hour.....because of their desire to be found...to be reunited with their loving Father

→and you see the twist in all this.... is that.... just like the father welcoming the son back instantly....not caring about what happened, or how it happened, or how he lost everything.....

→the same is true for you and me when it comes to our relationship with God and with each other

→and that is why...this season of Lent should be all the more meaningful.

→because in reality Lent is about true forgiveness and reconciliation.

--in the story...the father exhibits this spirit of true forgiveness and reconciliation when he not only welcomes his son back home and forgives his son for his bad decisions..... but he also **forgets** about all that his son had done

PAUSE

→and I believe that same is true for you and me, that God...certainly forgives **and** forgets the wrongs we have done when we ourselves are truly sorry for them...

that is what reconciliation is all about

→and perhaps that is the true challenge we are being called to this week.....to overcome our inability or unwillingness at times to not only forgive each other....but more importantly to forget about the wrongs that have been done to us...and the wrongs we have done to others.

PAUSE

---this Lent is offering each one of us the opportunity to be found...to turn our hearts to God....to awaken our faith....and embrace the mercy of God so that we might be reconciled to God and to each another.

→today's story...of the father's forgiveness of the son...reveals to us once again

--that our God forgives and loves us

--it is a lesson, perhaps, that we need to pay more attention to...as we continue to struggle in life with the hurts and disappointments....the words and actions....the sins and wrong doings of our lives

→and perhaps to realize that it is at those times in life.....when we find ourselves lost...that God wants us to return to him...return to our faith...and to realize that God's greatest gift to us is be found once again