

Lost And Found

Luke 15:1-10

portions taken from a sermon by Rev'd David H. Petersen
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever lost something valuable and searched for it valiantly? As it was lost, did you wonder what would happen if you didn't find it?

Ask Pauline or the boys how I get when I lose or misplace something. I become pretty much useless. Until I find the lost or misplaced item, I can do nothing else except look for it. As hard as it is to believe, I have even gotten focused on looking for a \$2.95 mechanical pencil that I misplaced, thereby making us late leaving for something or other.

I once thought I had lost my wallet while camping. I was consumed with finding it. I had terrible visions of identity theft, that someone would ring up thousands of dollars on my credit card or finding my identification and get into my bank account. Worse yet, ruining my credit or reputation by false use of my name.

Thankfully, it showed up, having fallen between the two front seats of the car.

In the parables Jesus tells, we find people who have lost things and are consumed with the search until they find what was lost - in particular a lost sheep and a coin.

When we consider these parables, we are brought to utter disbelief. Consider the shepherd who leaves the "ninety-nine in the open country, and goes after the one that is lost." Would a shepherd truly abandon the other sheep in the wilderness – with the lions, tigers, and bears-oh my – to find one that is lost?

Yes, a woman would search diligently for one lost coin, sweeping the house to find it. But, would she then throw a party, probably at the expense of that one and then a few more coins, to rejoice over finding the one that was lost?

That dear friends is the point of these parables – exactly the point. It isn't really about the shepherd or the woman, it is about God and His attitude toward the lost, those who are on the path to eternal destruction. What is the price that God would pay to bring back the wayward sheep or the lost coin?

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

They were scandalized. Jesus wasn't just eating with the adulterers, the gossips, the unforgiving, the liars, you know, the everyday, run of the mill sinners like you and me. Jesus was sitting down with the worst types of sinners – the murderers, the rapists, the terrorists who had blown up their neighbors, the child pornographers, and the serial killers. At least, that's who they would be today.

Jesus could have responded that He was simply meeting with them in order to point out their sins and call them to repentance. But He doesn't do this. Did you hear the parables? One of the hundred sheep were lost. One of the ten coins was lost. Jesus is pointing to these teachers of the law and is saying, One just like you was lost – one of the in crowd is now out. All are on the same footing. No one is better or worse in regard to sin.

The most vile sinners are on the same playing field with the Pharisees and the scribes. They are all His sheep! They are all His coins! They are all His sons. And, His love is so great that God will spare no effort to find them and bring them back, to forgive them and welcome them back into the fold. Each and every one of them is precious and valuable to Him.

Did you hear what God spoke to us through the prophet Micah? *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Christ didn't come to teach a new way to live. He didn't come even to punish or scold. God's great love came to purchase, and then dispense forgiveness to all sinners, even the most vile.

We're lost! We believe we're undeserving of such love. There must be a cost... There must be a price... We must do something to earn such goodness and grace from God. There must be a part that we can play.

So, we look at what we're doing and compare it to others, especially the most vile. We then believe we are deserving of God's love while they are not.

Jesus point is that none are deserving of God's love and forgiveness, yet He gives it still the same. All are lost, yet God desires that all be found, so He seeks to find and to save that which is lost – He seeks out you and me.

What did God do when He considered the cost of finding the lost? He paid the price, He made the ultimate sacrifice. With His own flesh, God seeks the lost. Upon the cross, He gave Himself unto death to pay for the sins of every single sinner - without consideration of their worthiness. There are none who are more privileged than any other, for all were lost.

God is looking for someone to love. He wants to sit down with sinners and eat with them. Even more, He plays host and He sets the table for them. He feeds them heavenly food – He feeds them His own flesh and blood.

As His friend, you too will sit down and eat with them and call them brother.

This is hard for the sons of Adam. We think we'd like some justice, some recompense, some recognition, and maybe even some vengeance. We'd like those other sinners to pay for what they've done. We'd like the world to know their shame and sorrow, how bad and stupid and

selfish they really are. We'd like them to feel some of the pain that they've caused.

Perhaps no one has ever been more guilty of this kind of hypocrisy than David. He was outraged at the story Nathan told: a rich man with a great flock stole a poor man's only lamb. David wanted justice. He declared: "As the Lord lives the man who has done this deserves to die."

True enough. That is what justice demands. But David seems to have forgotten what his mother taught him about pointing at others, there are four pointing back. Little did David think that he was the man, that he should die. He'd stolen far more than just a lamb. He stole a man's life. He took his family and his livelihood, his honor and his worth, and then he betrayed him once more and murdered him.

But David didn't die. His son died instead. David lived. He wrote Psalms and prayers that we sing to this day. He is probably the single most influential poet to ever breathe. What he wrote by inspiration in the Psalter has probably brought more comfort to God's people over the years than any other single book of the Bible. He was lost, but was found. He was dead in his trespasses, but was made alive by the death and resurrection, the seeking love and patient grace of his Son and his Lord. He did not deserve it, but God gave His mercy.

The Lord found him in his pride and cut him low with the Law, exposed his sins, took away his cover and his lies, but only to forgive his sins. He put away David's sin and David did not die, because Jesus died instead. David is the man and David still lives. He lives with Abraham and Moses, Isaac and Jacob, Peter, James, John, Paul, and Barnabas. He lives where God's people live, in the sight of the Lamb who was slain but who lives.

Of course David is not the only one who has engaged in hypocrisy. He is not the only one who has wanted others to pay and be accountable while he gets away with it, nor is He the only one who has given in to temptation. You are also the man.

Let David's life and repentance, his faith and his joy in the midst of sorrow and loss, in the midst of shame and fear, be your guide. Let the Psalms teach you the faith and learn to sing: "To Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee; Let me not be ashamed. Thou are the God of my salvation; on thee I wait all the day."

For if you are no better than David, neither are you any less forgiven, neither is your hope any less assured, neither does God love you any less. You are the lost sheep that He sought and found and laid upon His shoulders, rejoicing.

This is the heart and soul of our faith: Jesus seeks the lost, He receives and eats with sinners. It seems almost too good to be true, too common and easy to be valuable. But it is not cheap. It cost our Father the Life of His Son, the agony and suffering of Hell, the double betrayal and rejection.

Eden's choice was repeated in Gethsemane and Golgotha, and repeated still today, day after day as His people still choose to go the way of the flesh. Too often we turn our backs on the good things He gives and feed our cravings and desires in the dark. We demand honor and glory and

respect among men and lie, and steal, and cheat to get it. But still, despite your sin, Jesus seeks you. He searches for you. He wants and loves you. He seeks you out and finds you, He receives and eats with sinners.

Thanks be to God! God be praised: In Jesus the lost have been found - He receives and eats with sinners.

And if that is the heart and soul of our faith then surely the most significant place of His eating with sinners is where He gives them His Body and His Blood, where He enters into them and makes them His new Temple, the abode of the Holy Spirit, where He forgives sins and unites them to Himself in the foretaste of the banquet to come. What is offered in this place is none other than the LORD's Supper and He give it to you. You once were lost but now are found - and the angels rejoice. Amen.