

“Have You Ever Been Lost?”

**Luke 15:1-10** Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." <sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "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? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> "Or what woman having ten silver coins, <sup>1</sup> if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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Being lost is not a good feeling. We've all been there before. I can remember a few times. The first was when I was a child. Somehow I became separated from my mother in a department store. I wandered around a few minutes scared and crying wondering if I'd ever see my mom or even go home again. Then a sales clerk spotted me and took me to the Customer Service desk and solved my dilemma and my mother's by paging mom.

Another time was when I was in West Virginia. Route 219 is the main north/south route where I was and there are roads that turn off of it and run down by a river or through a small valley and then return a few miles on down the road. Stephen Hole Run Road is one such road. It turns off and runs alongside the Greenbrier River a few miles and then joins back up. The first time I traveled on Stephen Hole Run Road I was heading north and came to a fork in a turn in the road where if I had turned north I would have stayed on the Run road. But I went south because the turn north just looked like somebody's driveway to me and I wasn't yet to the river. I knew the road followed the river. So now unknowingly heading south I finally came to the river which to me seemed to be flowing the wrong way. I was heading downstream when I should have been heading upstream. That threw me. I had no idea where I was, things weren't making sense, so I began to get panicky. I didn't occur to me to just turn around and things would work themselves out. I just kept following that road thinking I'd come out in Buckeye. After passing a stretch of hunting shacks I came to a little town called Swego which had a paved road with yellow lines in which I knew had to go somewhere. It was no big deal, but being lost on mountain roads is stressful. You don't know where you'll wind up and when you do wind up somewhere it may be that you still have no idea where you're at.

Then there are times in life when we just get lost on the big scale; those times when we lose ourselves, don't know who we are or what to do or where to go. Things are going just fine and then something happens. Whether it was we

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failed to pay attention, missed the signs, missed the right turn or flat out took a wrong turn, we just know we're lost; not knowing what's going on, how we got there, or what direction we should take. We can even find ourselves in a dangerous and costly situation. It is a fearful thing when we hit a moment in life when we don't know where we're at, how we got there, and how to get out of it. Have you ever been lost?

Being lost is a crisis of faith. One of the things they teach you in scouting and military training and so forth is that when you are lost don't panic rather believe in yourself and trust that you have been given the right knowledge and skills to find your way out. Believe in yourself. Sometimes that works, but not always. The kind of lost I'm talking about leaves you unable to trust your own instincts because they contributed to getting you lost in the first place. It calls you to question who you are because who you've been is also a large part of why you're lost. The kind of lost I'm talking about is the kind that makes you look deep into yourself and say, "I'm a sinner. I've done my best and all I've done is hurt others, failed others, failed myself." Only by faith in God, only in knowing his steadfast love and faithfulness do we find our way out of this lostness. Have you ever been lost?

The amazing thing about these parables is the way Jesus describes how God goes after the lost. He doesn't go after them to get them with divine punishment. Rather, he goes like a shepherd searching for a lost sheep and when finding it he invites his friends for a celebration. Shepherds really do leave the flock to go in search of the one sheep that is missing. To us practical people that seems like a risky, if not stupid, thing to do. Why risk all the sheep for one? Well, sheep are very social animals and if they get separated from the flock they will get quite anxious and panicky and cause a great disturbance that will attract predators. If the shepherd doesn't act fast to find the lost sheep it will certainly be eaten. I presume the rest of the flock will be safe for they will stick together and any predators that are out there will be after the lost sheep because it's easy prey. For the shepherd to simply write the lost sheep as a loss would be foolish. It would be like my mother writing me off for dead when we got separated in the department store and going home to console herself by gathering together the rest of the family to grieve. The shepherd diligently searches for the lost sheep knowing that it is not a lost cause and when he finds it he throws it upon his shoulders to give it a sense of security as well as to keep it from running off again and then he celebrates. So it is with us and God. When we are lost God doesn't write us off but rather seeks diligently for us and when he finds us he comforts us and there is celebration.

The next parable that Jesus tells is that of a woman who has lost a coin. In Jesus day it was rare for a woman to have money at all. In this case she had ten drachma's or ten day's wages strung on a necklace. One fell off and became lost. Does she right it off as a loss? No. She lights a lamp so that she can see into every corner and starts to thoroughly clean the house until she finds it. Once again, so it is with us and God when we are lost. God turns on the light of his love, indeed his very presence with us and searches us out, cleaning our hearts as he goes until we know we have been found. God seeks us out when we are

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lost and he doesn't come bent on punishing us. Rather, he comes diligently searching to return us home or he comes diligently cleaning removing the sin in our lives until we know we're found and then it is cause for celebration.

I've spoken about what it is to be lost and that God in his steadfast love and faithfulness seeks out the lost. I guess now I should say something about being found. This past Wednesday was a very anxious day for me. Dana had come home for her classes Tuesday and shocked me with the news that she was going to have to drop her classes this semester. That sort of blew my five year plan for us and gave me that old lost feeling of having no idea where things are going. Well, I had William for the afternoon and it was naptime for the both of us and so I laid down with him and snuggled him up into my armpit. As I lay there, I began to mull things over and then I looked down at his peaceful little cutest baby in the world face and it hit me. I don't need to worry about what lies ahead. Look at where God in his steadfast love and faithfulness has brought me. After going through the lostness of a failing marriage and divorce and taking a wrong turn that seemed to be the right turn that left me without work for a year, here I am with the cutest baby in the world nestled in my armpit. Who'd of ever thought?! That's what it is to be found.

Being found leads to repentance. Repentance has gotten a bad rap since the Middle Ages. We think of it as cleaning up your act and getting right with God so that things will go well for you. Repentance comes only after God has sought and found us and then being found by God in his steadfast love and faithfulness we spend our days seeking after God. The New Testament Greek word for repentance actually means to change one's mindedness, to change one's pursuits, one's direction in life, to change one's way of thinking. It is to go from the panicky anxiety of being lost to having faith. Repentance is faith; faith based on knowing that God is steadfastly loving and faithful. When God in his steadfast love and faithfulness finds, the encounter creates faith in us which brings about repentance, a seeking after this God who has found us.

Friends, our God is a God who keeps company with sinners, with the lost. It is okay for one's life to be a mess, to be lost; for it is when we are lost that God is seeking us and when he seeks, he finds and it is miraculously good. Amen.