

LOST AND FOUND



* ... there is joy in the presence
of the angels of God over one
sinner that repenteth.
(Luke 15:10)

Scripture:

Hosea 11: 1-11

1. When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
2. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.
3. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them.
4. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.
5. They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me.
6. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes.
7. My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.
8. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.
9. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.
10. They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west.
11. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD.

Luke 15: 1-24

1. Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.
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. 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 sheep that was lost."
7. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people 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. 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.'
11. Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons.
12. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them.

13. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.
14. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.
15. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.
16. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.
17. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!
18. I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;
19. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"
20. So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.
21. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."
22. But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe-the best one-and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.
23. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;
24. for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.



LOST AND FOUND

Being lost is no fun. It is a frustrating, often scary experience. At one time or another we all get lost. Many of us have missed a turn driving a car and are unable to find our way back to the main road.

We also feel lost when we lose a family member by death or we are involved in a divorce.

When we pass through such an experience, we often become bewildered and confused. We do not know which way to go, where to turn, what the next step ought to be and what direction to take.

Sometimes we feel lost when we feel guilty. We feel lost when we sense that we have hurt another person or violated our own personal morals or convictions. We know we have created a mess and every solution we can imagine only makes things worse.

Economic problems can make us feel lost also. When we lose a job or find out that the checking account is overdrawn, we become fearful and anxious and sometimes we become immobilized. We can't think clearly. We don't see any way out of the problem. It is no fun being lost.

But being lost may be good for us, because being lost has a way of humbling us. When we lose our way driving a car, we are often embarrassed. Why? Because we like to think we can manage things, particularly the simpler things of life like finding an address or reading a map. Suddenly we have to face the fact that we are not perfect, that we make mistakes.

Forgetting something is a humbling experience. Being humbled is painful, but humility is a

necessary ingredient in a human being. It enables God to work with us. When humility is lacking, God is blocked out of our lives.

**OUR NEW TESTAMENT LESSON THIS MORNING
CONSISTS OF A PARABLE ABOUT LOST SHEEP,
AND ANOTHER ONE ABOUT A LOST COIN
AND ONE ABOUT A LOST SON.
THESE PARABLES REMIND US
THAT GOD SEEKS US WHEN WE ARE LOST.**

THE SELF-RELIANT RANCHER

There is a story about a strong self-reliant ranch owner, named John, who did not often express his emotions outwardly, and who did not feel he needed help from anyone. One day he had to rush his wife, Sarah, to the hospital. It was determined that Sarah had a ruptured appendix. The ensuing operation was successful, but Sarah's condition deteriorated. Despite the blood transfusions and intensive care, she continued to lose strength. The doctors were puzzled because by all medical standards, Sarah should have been recovering. The doctors finally were convinced of the reason for her deterioration. Sarah was not trying to get well.

The surgeon, who was an old family friend, went to Sarah and said, "I would think you would want to be strong for John." She replied weakly, "John is so strong he doesn't need anybody."

When the doctor told John what Sarah had said, John became confused and bewildered. John was lost. His wife was dying. John felt he had failed Sarah somehow. The doctor helped John figure out what John needed to do.

John went to Sarah's room, took her hand in his, and said, "You have to get well."

Without opening her eyes, Sarah asked, "Why?" John said, "Because I need you."

The nurse who was monitoring the blood transfusion noticed an immediate change in Sarah's pulse beat and blood pressure.

Sarah opened her eyes and said, "John, that is the first time you ever said that to me." For the first time in their marriage, John did more than make love to Sarah. He loved her with the touch of his hands and with the voice that God gave him. John used that voice and formed words with his God given tongue, and said openly, "I love you. I really need you." John became humbled enough to let God use him, and he became an instrument through whom God gave his blessings to Sarah. (1)

GOD IS ABLE TO USE US

**THAT IS WHY WE NEED TO GET LOST,
WHY WE NEED TO PASS THROUGH DARK AND
TROUBLING TIMES, SO THAT WE CAN BE BROUGHT
TO OUR KNEES BEFORE GOD.
THEN GOD IS ABLE TO USE US TO
BRING BLESSINGS TO US AND OTHERS AROUND US.**

Even though being lost may be good for us at times, it is not a very pleasant experience, and if we continue to be lost for too long a time it can be very destructive and counterproductive. When we are lost and humbled, we can come to feel so bad about ourselves that we are unable to function. Sooner or later we need to find our way or be found.

And that is what our parables of the morning are all about. Jesus reminds us in these parables that God will search for us when we are lost, and we will come to realize that we have value and are loved. In our periods of wandering and confusion, we will be helped to find our way when we come to believe that God loves us and values us and is always seeking us.

GOD SEEKS US OUT

Jesus tells us that when one of the flock is lost, when one coin is lost, God spares nothing in order to find the one lost object. God drops everything else and goes after the lost person. These small parables remind us that God actively seeks us out when we are lost and brings us back into communion and into community with others. None of us are beyond God's concern and seeking.

THE RECKLESS DRIVER AND DR. BRONSON

One day a driver recklessly swerved around the corner of a residential street, obviously intoxicated. Before he could stop, he struck a young child and then veered into a tree. The police and ambulance came on the scene, pronounced the small child dead, and took the man to the hospital. He had suffered a broken back, and could not move.

A week later he learned that the only doctor qualified to perform surgery on his back was Dr. Bronson, the father of the child he had killed. The man wondered as he lay paralyzed in his bed, "How can I ask anything of Dr. Bronson. I don't deserve his attention or care." The doctor agreed to perform the surgery, and it was successful.

Later, the two men talked and the driver asked the doctor why he had agreed to operate. Dr. Bronson said, "I believe in Jesus Christ and that means I am first of all willing to give you the benefit of my skills because you need it, not because you deserve it. Jesus doesn't love me because I deserve it. Jesus loves me because I need his love."

WHAT JESUS' PARABLES TEACH US

That is what our two parables are all about. Jesus is teaching us that God knows when we need God's presence and God knows that we don't deserve it. God does not operate on the basis of an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. And God will come to us through people like Dr. Bronson who should hate us but who show God's care and love.

Remember that great passage from Hosea that I read earlier. God talks to Israel in the passage as if the nation was a son. God is angry with Israel because they have abandoned God's teachings and are worshipping other gods. God vows to destroy them. And then, in a remarkable change of heart, God says, "How can I give you up Ephraim (one of the tribes of ancient Israel)? How can I hand you over, O Israel? My heart recoils within me. I will not execute my fierce anger."

LISTEN CAREFULLY

When we are lost, we need to listen carefully to words spoken to us by others. We need to watch events going on around us, for God is at work in those events. And through little comments and the words of friends and the events occurring around us, God is trying to get through to us. God is telling

us, "I care about you. Follow me and I will lead you to safety and security."

When we are lost, we need to pick up our Bible and read it, we need to spend time in quiet meditation and prayer, listening for God's word to us. We need to talk with close and trusted Christian friends who will help us find our way back on the path of life again.

It is important for us to remember that God will give us directions and those directions will come in very surprising ways:

**through words on the pages of the Bible
through the comments and actions of friends
in the quiet moments of meditation and prayer
when we are alone.**

WHAT IS A GRANDMA?

Some years ago, a third grade girl was asked to write a paper for school on the subject: What is a Grandma?

She wrote: *A grandma is a lady who has no children of her own, so she likes other people's little girls. A grandpa is a man grandma. He goes for walks with boys and talks about fishing and snakes.*

Grandmas don't have to do anything but be there. Grandmas drive you to the super-market where the pretend horse is, and they have lots of dimes. Or if they take you for walks, they slow down past pretty leaves and caterpillars. Grandmas never say, "Hurry up."

Sometimes grandmas are fat, but not too fat to tie kids shoes. Grandmas wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth and gums off. They answer questions like, "Why do cats hate dogs?" and "How come God isn't married?" When they read to us, they don't skip words or mind if it's the same story again.

Everybody should try to have a grandma, especially if you don't have a TV, because grandmas are the only grownups who have got time and open up their hearts to you. (2)

Like many of us, this child must have had a grandma who shared God's love and care with her. When we are lost, we need to look for the Grandmas and Grandpas around us, people who open their hearts to us and have got time for us. And God puts such people around us, but we need to be

willing to ask them for help. They are closer than we think.

It is no fun being lost, but it can be a time to grow, to change and to realize:

- how very close God is to us;
- how very much God means to us;
- how very much God loves us and is seeking us;
- how much God values us and wants us to be strong again.

In Luke's gospel, both our parables are followed by the famous parable of the Prodigal son about a lost son. When the prodigal son came home, the father said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and rejoice. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."

That is the joy that God feels when we come back to God after being lost. God finds us and we are with God again. But the most important question is, can we really believe that God is at work in our life?

THE GOOD NEWS

The good news of the Christian faith is that God is always searching for us. But do we have faith enough to believe that good news? If we do believe, we will begin to sense that God will not only welcome us, but God will never let us go. When we get lost again he will come after us and find us. God will bring us home again and welcome us with open arms. God will never let us go.

(1) "When God Opens Us to Himself and One Another," from the Sound of a Sermon, (Parish Publications, Inc. Madison Heights, Michigan, September 19, 1983.

(2) Ibid.



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