

Seek, Find, Rejoice  
Luke 15: 1-32

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May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Have you ever felt lost? Been overwhelmed? Not known which direction to turn – or what might await you at the end of the road? Somehow I think that we can all find a perch somewhere in those questions.

Now, let me ask, have you ever experienced finding someone or being found? I think of the recent earthquake stories, where people – and pets - have been pulled from the rubble. Or camping stories, where hikers and campers who have lost their way – are then found. Or to put it more simply, as a young child, I was separated from my parents on the Blue Nose Ferry between Yarmouth, NS and Bar Harbor, ME and then found.... And in the midst of these thoughts, I would ask, do we pay as much attention to finding – or being found - as being lost? I wonder...

Our scripture lesson today brings us three stories, most often associated with being lost. We acquire this orientation from their titles: the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the parable of the Lost Coin, and then there's the story of the Prodigal Son, which could be rephrased to be the Parable of the Lost Son. But, I would invite us today to reorient ourselves from what is customary and instead consider them from the conclusions of the stories and consider how and where and why our God chooses to be a finder. One who is about – in the midst of our life stories - having us be found and having all around rejoice at such healing, wholing... and finding.

Now let's take a closer look, at how our gospel writer draws us into Jesus' teachings.. The first verse of this chapter tells of Jesus as one who was more than approachable. Hear it again. "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were (there) grumbling ..." Clearly a wide range of everyone felt welcomed, or at least justified to be there with Jesus. The faithful as recognized by the synagogue, and the unworthy, the sinners and tax collectors. We really have an amazing gathering present to receive Jesus' teachings. And given Jesus' story format for teaching, it was possible for people to listen without feeling attacked, possible to hear the story and then give it a second or even a third thought.

Now for the stories themselves. You know them. First we come to the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and the parable of the Lost Coin. They are paired together. In the first, we have a shepherd, who owned a hundred sheep, and upon losing one of them, left the ninety and nine and went after the one who was lost. And when he found that one, he carried it home on his shoulders and rejoiced. Then Jesus went on to explain that there would be more joy in heaven over the one sinner who

repents, than over the 99 who were faithful. Knowing that parables were told to teach about the Kingdom of God, Here we have the shepherd representing God. And the sheep, representing ourselves, those who would follow.

Let me begin by saying that sheep need their shepherd. I am no farmer, but I would tell you about a time when we had a shepherdess come visit our Sunday School, back in the day. She had brought her sheep to elementary schools, but she had never come to a Sunday School and wasn't too sure of what she had to offer us. However, while there she discovered she did have important things to teach us. She told us about the foolishness of sheep, and their need for a shepherd. She explained that sheep can easily get lost. Also that sheep, when lying down on a hillside, will try to roll up hill to stand up again...a very difficult task for a sheep with a heavy coat of wool. The sheep need their shepherd, just as we need our God. And the shepherd is about our good care – even when he or she has 99 who are well, who follow and he goes out and searches until he finds the one who is lost.

Next we come to the woman who has lost one of her ten silver coins. She then turns on the lamp and turns the house upside down, cleaning and searching until the missing coin is found. And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors inviting them and saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost”. And she proclaims that there is more joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who turns and repents.

Two familiar stories...and what do they have to teach us – about God, and about our relationship with God?

I believe they teach that God cares for all of us, everyone of us, for the whole herd, and our God will notice if one of us becomes lost, and will as far as is necessary out of God's way to rescue us, rejoicing when we are found!

And with the coin, again, even when only one coin is missing, God will turn on the light and will sweep – work hard and search carefully until we are found. And let us not forget that God's finding leads to rejoicing. God is joyful when we are found, and calls all to rejoice in those findings.

Good news for us – and amazing and important revelations about God, and God's love for even the least of us.

Staying with the midst of familiar stories, but moving now to the more complex and we find find these lost and found stories actually becoming the preface for the story of the Prodigal Son. See here if you can draw some parallels.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, we begin with a father who has two sons. The younger son went to him and asked for his share of the property. So, the Father divided his property, giving the younger son his share, after which the younger son, set off and traveled to a distant country - where he squandered his property in dissolute living. Alone and inexperienced, he spent everything. Having nothing, necessity drove him to hire himself out to a farmer to do hard labor on his farm,

caring for the pigs, and minus the swill the pigs were eating, he had nothing to eat. I think we could describe him as lost, first parallel. But see what comes next. Not so much of a parallel this time, but a new response. The younger son realizes his mistakes and decides to go home to escape the famine. And he goes home, ready to declare himself a sinner, no longer worthy to be considered his father's son, and plans to ask to be treated like one of the hired hands. Here we have the preparation for confession and the seeking of forgiveness. But what else? We have the father, who loved his son and had given him his share of the inheritance, now seeing him in the distance, and the father runs to him, oblivious of what he may have done wrong, filled with compassion. He then discovers that his son, who had been lost, chose to return and apologize. But rather than being treated like one of his father's hired hands, he is redeemed in the midst of his father's rejoicing. Here are the parallels – he was lost, then found, and there is rejoicing/

This story is more complex. The son had made many mistakes, had sinned and then repents. The son realized his shortcomings – we could even say his failures, and upon admitting these is hugged, and has a banquet thrown for him, with rings on his fingers, a robe, and a feast in his honor. His sins are part of his lostness. He was lost, and is found. God's heart simplifies the process.

Friends, how many of us have been lost? Have squandered that which we had, and realized what we have done. How many of us have felt unworthy to be called God's children? How many of us have had moments where we felt unredeemable. But here, let us learn as did the younger son, that God's love conquers all. That our God rejoices when we choose to come to God. That there is nothing we can do to stop that love, and that compassion. And if we will let it be so, there will be rejoicing in our being found. It doesn't matter if are an only child, a poor child, or a wealthy child. We are God's child.

But let us not only think of ourselves. We, too, can look for the lost. How many people have we encountered who are lost? Do we ever look around, look up from our intended pathways. As God's hands and feet in this world, might we, too, newly taught by Jesus' stories, help in the finding?

One more story, and one more amazing image of God. - Here is a brief thought piece written by Adrienne Rich entitled "Upper Broadway" written in 1975

*Now I must write for myself for this blind  
Woman scratching the pavement with her wand of thought.  
This slippered crone inching on icy streets  
Reaching into wire trashbaskets pulling out  
What was thrown away and infinitely precious.*

*I look at my hands and see they are still unfinished  
I look at the vine and see the leafbud  
Inching towards life.*

*I look at my face in the glass and see  
A half born woman.*

Friends, God is without and within us. God is there showing us how to return, how to repent, and how to come home to a place of rejoicing. Perhaps those who grumble might also see the compassion, the love, and the rejoicing that defies logic, that defies fairness. For God's love has always been there for all – early and often, inviting, and then carrying us home on God's shoulders, meeting us as we rise, with a dusty coin in our hands, preciously holding us in our dustiness, and ready to put a fine robe around our shoulders, rings on our fingers, and a feast at the end of the road.

Today is Homecoming Sunday. We are here to meet and welcome one another with compassion, to rejoice with one another, and to realize the gift of a church home where all are welcome, all are beloved by our God, and our Pot Luck Cook-out/Cook-in will definitely be a time of feasting.  
Amen!