

2019 09 15 – Lost & Found

Luke 15:1-10

How many of you remember the July evening earlier this year when a toddler went missing from a family gathering near Aneroid? Do you remember how you felt when you heard the news? Do you remember what emotions you experienced? What did you feel? (*wait for answers – fear, sadness, anxiety*) It was easy for us to put ourselves in the place of those distraught family members, wasn't it?

When I read today's scripture it was this recent news story that came to mind. I went online and found it in the CBC archives. There I discovered that the child's mother was in Edmonton when he got lost and that she jumped into a car with her brother-in-law, who drove them through the night. She described that nine-hour drive as "horrendous." She said, "You feel so exhausted but you just can't sleep because you can't sleep when you know your baby is lost. It was the most horrific night of my life, by far."

When this frantic mother arrived in Aneroid in the early morning hours she began searching for her child. She described her search in this way:

I hit the fields and just basically sprinted through the fields for hours and hours, hysterically crying, and praying to be guided toward him. But it was literally like looking for a needle in a haystack.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/where-am-i-toddler-stuck-in-mud-hole-overnight-still-awakes-in-panic-says-mother-1.5229242>

She was, of course, joining a search that had been going on for hours. There were police officers and search dogs, family members and neighbours on foot, horseback and driving all-terrain vehicles searching the fields and the bogs nearby. They had all left their lives, their families, their belongings behind to come and search for this one lost child.

This is the kind of searching that Jesus was describing in today's parables from the gospel of Luke. He told of the shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep in an open pasture (a pasture with no fences) and went searching for the one sheep that was lost. Jesus described how the woman whose coin was lost lit a lamp using precious oil and swept her house, searching every surface, every nook and cranny.

Thankfully, in each of today's stories that which was lost, is found. The shepherd finds the lost sheep, the woman finds the lost coin and neighbours on horseback find the toddler up to his neck in mud with only minor cuts, bites and bruises.

In the parables, Jesus also emphasizes the rejoicing that takes place when that which was lost is found. The shepherd and the woman both call in their friends and neighbours and hold a party in celebration. When the frantic mother hears that her toddler has been found she rushes to get to his side. A man on horseback spots her running and says "Get on," and pulls her up on the back of the horse. They gallop down the road, until they come across someone on a Gator, an all-terrain vehicle. The driver yanks her onto the back of the Gator and holds her hand on his and they speed down the road to her child. When she

finally reaches him, she cries and holds her child tightly; she clutches her precious little one who was lost for an entire night, but who now has been found. She rejoices and as the news spreads an entire nation rejoices with her.

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Jesus wanted us to know that this is how the God of Love, the Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being feels when one of us is lost. When even one of us is disconnected from the sacred within us, when even one of us is fumbling around in the dark not knowing where we are, then like the mother, the shepherd, the woman with the lost coin, God misses us and searches unceasingly until we are found.

This is good news! It's good news for anyone who is lost and needs to be found. But I guess the next question is what does it mean to be lost? How do we know when we are lost? What does being lost look like to you and to me?

We might get a hint of what Jesus meant by looking at the context of the parables. Jesus told these two stories to the Pharisees and the religious scholars. He directed these parables to the leaders of the synagogue because they were making negative comments, murmuring, about the fact that Jesus welcomed sinners and even ate with them. These religious scholars didn't think it was appropriate for Jesus to associate with anyone that was breaking their Jewish laws. So Jesus explained that even the sinners, even those who were "lost" were still beloved children of God and that "there will be more joy in heaven

over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent.”

Many of you may be sitting back now and saying, “Oh that explains it, good thing I’m not one of those. Good thing I’m not someone who breaks the law. Good thing I’m not a sinner.” Well maybe you are and maybe you’re not. Maybe you are someone who works really hard to do what is right, to follow the rules and to live as a good Christian should. Most of us in this room probably would fit that description. But does that really mean that we are never lost? Does that really mean that we never need to be found?

There are lots of ways that we can lose ourselves and become disconnected from that which is sacred in our lives. I invite you think about these questions:

- Might the parents who want their children to succeed so much that they wrap their whole lives around hockey games and dance recitals be lost?
- Might the career minded man or woman who has made moving up the ladder their one and only priority be lost?
- Might the folks who work jobs they hate just to give their family things they never had be lost?
- Might the senior who has a great pension plan but little sense of meaning since retirement be lost?
- Might the teen who works so hard to be perfect and who is willing to do just about anything to fit in be lost?
- Might the earnest Christian who spends so much time volunteering that they have no time left for their family or themselves be lost?

<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2737>

Might each one of us at some point in our lives be lost? It is possible to be righteous and still lose our way in this world. It is possible to seem to have it all together but to still feel at times, quite lost.

The good news is that this sanctuary, this church family is a place for all those who feel lost, sinner and righteous alike. So I invite you to admit your own lostness, to confide your hopes and fears, your dreams and disappointments to God. You can be confident that when you turn toward the sacred for any reason, when you allow yourself to be found, then God gives one heck of a party and invites all the angels to celebrate. The good news is that God's love is unconditional; God's mercy is unbounded; God's grace is truly amazing.