

Lost and Found
Sermon for September 11, 2022

Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word.

In today's Gospel, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' grumbling about the company he keeps by telling the stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin, the search to find them and the joy that ensues when they are found.

Jesus claimed, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." As such, Jesus places great value on repentance and redemption and does not write off those who are lost to sin. This concept was not shared by the Pharisees, who saw themselves as pillars of their community, but whose preoccupation with ritual observance blinded them to their own sin and caused them to forget God's love for sinners. The Pharisees, who thought they were on the right path to please God, judged others with a sense of self-righteousness, a weakness of man, instead of adhering to God's law of love. God is not interested in a closed community but is all about inclusion.

Howard Thurman said, "Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, and death to communion with his Father. He affirmed life, and hatred was the great denial." If you treat people as the Pharisees did, you provide no sense of worth, no opportunity for redemption. And, no matter what the Pharisees thought, we as all sinners at one time or another.

Many sermons on this text use the experience of losing an item, and then finding it to personalize these parables, to have us internalize the joy Jesus feels when a sinner has repented. Instead of the usual, "How did you feel when you lost something and then found it?", think about a time when you were lost.

For me, it was the first time I drove to Hartford. Getting to my destination was easy enough by daylight. However, driving out of Hartford at night was a somewhat unnerving experience as it was before I had Google Maps. You just can't backtrack your way out of there. I did not know this at the time, so I was caught in a maze of one-way streets, seeing in the distance where I needed to be but not knowing how to get there. Luckily, I stopped at a gas station where the attendant was able to give me precise directions. I was finally homeward bound, my anxiety soothed by someone who provided me with the right way to go.

The expulsion from the Garden of Eden began Man's journey to find his way back home. This journey is primarily a search: a search for meaning, a search for companionship, a search for something that is missing that would illuminate our way home.

In both of today's parables, the search is the most dramatic part each story, leaving the flock in the wilderness to find the one lost sheep, turning the house upside down to find a coin. The extent of these searches indicates how important it is to recover what is lost.

We all search to recover what is lost. I am not talking about car keys or cell phones. It is the search for lost innocence, to see things as they truly are without our own cynicism, our own ritual observances, and biases.

Our lives take a series of paths. The ones we choose and why we chose them has everything to do with our returning home safe and sound. The directions we need are simple, straightforward, and provided by Jesus: to put yourself in the shoes of others, to base your actions on how they will affect others, to be able to forgive. This requires a great deal of soul-searching to get to the heart of our actions. We may take many wrong turns and detours that we can rationalize, but Christ is always with us, our wingman, if only we can heed him. Remember, God can write straight with crooked lines.

Now that I have google maps in my car, I sometimes must be careful not to second guess the directions given me. When I do, a recalculation is necessary to get me back on the right path. Similarly, we need to be patient and open to understand the path God wants us to travel on in our search for home, even if it sometimes means we take a detour which will give us what we need to get back on the right track.

We make mistakes. That IS our nature. Jesus' teachings tell us that there is great joy in heaven when we see the errors of our ways and come home to him. We were lost and but now found, blind but now we see, to paraphrase that old chestnut. Our sins are not indelible. There is always an opportunity for repentance and redemption. We all need to search for and find our way back to the Garden of Eden.

I ask you to consider the following:

Spend a few quiet minutes thinking about the paths your life has taken, both the high and low roads. Where are you headed next? What are you searching for?

Think of friendships lost to you. Why are you estranged? Are the reasons for this estrangement really that important? What can you do to redeem these friendships? Search your heart to gain the strength to forgive.

Today, of all days, there is another search I am reminded of. On that September 11, all through New York City, so many photos of loved ones with the plea, "Have You Seen...?"

May all those who lost loved ones on that day find peace and closure.
May all those lost on that day be found in the arms of Christ.
May all our hearts be found by God and drawn to Hm.

Amen.

Laura Daly, Licensed Lay Preacher

