

Luke 15:1-10            The Lost  
September 15, 2019

My guess is that people have been losing things since there have been people around to lose them, and things to lose. The losing of things and the things lost have become a metaphor for life. All of life is a lost and found.

Several years ago I was changing a light bulb that had gone out in my bedroom. The fixture was typical, a glass shield, or globe, was connected to the fixture through a threaded post and held in place by a small decorative nut. While attempting to connect it, I dropped it, it hit the bed on the way down and landed on the carpeted floor and rolled away to some never land where it would remain for years.

I searched everywhere with no success, so in the end I had to buy a replacement. At one point years later I re-arranged the furniture and had the carpet cleaned. Since it was not really all that important I must confess that I did not spend much time thinking about it but I figured if it wasn't there when the carpet was cleaned, it was gone for good. I forgot about it.

I knew that it had to be somewhere, but it simply wasn't worth the extra effort and time to find it, so I behaved as if I believed it had somehow magically disappeared, fallen into some supposed portal into another world like in a science fiction story or a fairy tale. It was as lost as anything can be.

## Important Things

Some things are a great deal more important than the little decorative nut that holds the globe on a light fixture. People are justifiably more concerned about the loss of more valuable things. Several years before the loss of the globe nut, while living in Spartanburg, SC, I got up one morning to go to work and went out to the parking lot of my apartment building, and couldn't find my car.

Now something had to be done about this so I called the police and reported it stolen. They said there was a couple of possibilities; that perhaps youthful pranksters had taken it for a joy ride and would abandon it when it ran out of gas, or in a more sinister vein, drug runners had stolen it and would do the same, somewhere on the east coast. So after a few days the car might turn up abandoned somewhere. When it wasn't found, I had to make an insurance claim to get it replaced.

(Turns out that it was found that very day and taken to a salvage yard to sit until it was claimed. It was the county police that found it and the city police to whom I had reported it missing. The two departments did not communicate with each other back then, so the car sat less than a mile away from where I lived until the lot ran out of space, identified me as the owner, called and said, "hey, we have your car." It was too late, of course).

## The Loss of People

Of course, the loss of people is even more devastating and threatening. If a child can't be found panic ensues. The stakes are high and the communities will become involved, there will be amber alerts and national media campaigns.

Losing things and people is a common feature of life, When Jesus needed an illustration for God's love and mercy, it sat right there like a balloon ready to be popped. He spoke of the loss of a lamb, and a coin. But he moves on to the story of a lost son. So we can assume that is what he was really talking about all along.

The lost son wasn't lost because he wandered off or was kidnapped. He wasn't lost in the sense of his parents not knowing where he was and in a panic searching for him. In the parable sense, lostness meant the loss of relationship.

Religiously we have spoken of people outside of a faith relationship with God as "lost." Certainly the metaphor of lost hardware or cars or animals or coins has come to stand for lost relationships; when friends lose each other or families lose each other, or the human relation to God is lost. No matter how hard we try to forget about them, or get a replacement, or behave as if there is some magic involved that makes them seem as if they were never there, these losses leave their mark.

## The Loss of the Self

There is another facet of lostness to consider, and that is the loss of the self. The loss of the self may be the most tragic of all. It occurs when someone no longer is connected to themselves or their heritage; they are searching, they have lost a sense of meaning and direction, lost their focus. In the Lion King, Mufasa says to Simba, "You have forgotten who you are."

Entire societies can get lost in this way, life becomes a chaotic free-for-all with no meaning. People will sometimes attach themselves to movements of lesser meaning, like sports fandom, or political parties, or even religious groups, in order to fill the empty void. Many of these groups require great sacrifices, maybe even the willingness to die for the cause; the nation, the party or something.

Offering oneself ultimately to that which is not ultimate is idolatry. Remember that. It doesn't solve the lostness problem, but only intensifies it.

## The Gospel of Foundness

Thankfully, the gospel of Jesus Christ is only partly about lostness. All of life is a lost *and* found. It is about searching and being sought, about finding and being found. In the story Jesus told it was the one lost lamb that was found, and the lost coin and the idea is that God is searching.

The primary feature of the finding is an inexpressible joy that could only be shared. And most of all, it was this wonderful idea that when one lost soul is found, there is some kind of cosmic party in heaven, the angels themselves dancing a jig over one sinner who repents.

So if lostness is a metaphor for life, one that is commonly understood and rather easy to relate, then also finding and being found is a metaphor for salvation. So think of that, finding something that was lost, no matter how insignificant. How did that make you feel? How especially did you feel when what was lost was a relationship, or perhaps even yourself, something so much more valuable than any thing could ever be?

As you might imagine, I found the little decorative nut that held the glass plate to the fixture on the ceiling. It happened in 2015 when I was preparing to move to Ohio. The movers came and took all the furniture away, even though I had one night left in the house.

With nothing in the room it suddenly became visible, lodged in the carpeting in the spot where it had come to rest more than a decade before. While I did not dance a jig or scream for joy, not for something so relatively insignificant, finding it did make me laugh. It brought a smile to my face.

And that seems to be the point Jesus is trying to make. No matter how one suffers a lack of self-esteem, God's love is so great that even in the midst

of billions of other people in an indefinite universe that makes all of us feel small, the heavens rejoice when one of us is found.

This does not imply a superficial game that only applies to formal conversions, but to a much deeper reality when a lost self is found, when a person is healed of all the arrogance and pride so commonly found among people; the selfishness and greed, the malice and the anger and the bitterness, the fear and anxiety; that world-bending dynamic when a person is no longer driven by their own twisted self-concern and is liberated by grace to a life of faith that leads to mercy, compassion, kindness, and love.

Ant that is worth celebrating.

[\*\*Back\*\*](#)[\*\*Home\*\*](#)