

Luke 15:1-10  
September 11, 2022

## Found Things

From time to time one hears about people searching for themselves. On its face the phrase sounds silly because in the literal sense we spend little time in life confused over our whereabouts. If a person is lost because they don't know where they are, a little consultation with a map or a cell phone conversation with Siri can pretty easily settle the issue.

In a different way, most people know where they are from and it doesn't take too much guessing to figure out their place in the scheme of things; their age, their relationship status, their income level, vocational concerns, their relatives, etc, things like that. So it is apparent that when people speak of being, "in search of the self," it has a different kind of significance.

A person *can* be lost inside their own skin; they can lose their way in the sense that whatever goals they set for themselves, and whatever dreams they are pursuing can become secondary to them, and that can lead to distraction, being off course, that kind of thing. Lost.

And then, of course, there is the grand sense that on some level everyone must deal with life's ultimate questions; what is the meaning of our lives? Is there a God, and how do we understand God? What happens when people die and is there anything like a moral standard to live by? One can be lost if they have no

sense for these questions and therefore no direction in life.

So it is not surprising that among the parables, Jesus told stories about lost things. In the case of our gospel reading today; the lost sheep and the lost coin. These provide the context for the next parable in Luke, that we have not read but which is familiar enough, the Parable of the Lost Son, or the Prodigal.

Parables usually involve surprises of one kind or another. Sheep have economic value, that is the whole reason they are kept. One can sell them for food or keep them for wool, or both. When one of them gets lost, there is a monetary value set to it.

The surprise in this story is that the shepherd has 100 sheep, and in the course of searching for *one* that is lost, risks losing *all* the rest. Even those who are not good at math can figure the risk/reward here, it would clearly be better to bring ninety-nine sheep to market than to risk losing them all, or half of them, or even just two or three, which would be enough to cut the profit margin. We learn the quality of love, that God loves each as if there is only one, and all equally.

In the story about the lost coin, it is not clear whether the surprise involves the precious notice I used the word "precious," like maybe what to us might be a \$100 bill, something valuable enough that if it is lost, one would search high and low for it, and the surprise is that they were careless enough to lose it in the first place.

Or perhaps it was a penny, or for us even a dime or a quarter, so that it is not precious. The surprise is that someone is bothering to search at all, rather than going on as if nothing has been lost.

Both things happen, of course. People manage to lose precious things all the time, and sometimes spend precious time searching for worthless things; or on the contrary, failing to take into account the collective value of the little things that when lost, can add up to more than one might think. The Parable of the Lost Son is full of surprises and bears much of the same meaning.

I doubt very much that there is anyone here that does not have an experience of losing something, or who doesn't have a memory of their own lostness whether it is the time when you took a wrong turn and ended up in a strange place, or in the sense of being off course in life. So it is also not very surprising that we focus our attention on the lost things in these parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, and on the searching that follows.

At the risk, however, of overstating the obvious, the general energy in these stories is *not* about *lost* things, but rather *things found*. One wonders why these parables, when given titles like in the way the narrative is broken up, are not called, "The Parable of the Lamb That Was Found," or, "The Parable of the Found Coin," or, "The Parable of the Son Who Was Saved?" There is certainly an emphasis on the celebration of

foundness that takes up a great deal of space in these stories. "Foundness" must not be a word because it is underlined in red in the computer text, but I use it here anyway.

And the way Jesus tells the stories, even the angels, even God, is more attentive to the foundness of the lost than in the lostness of the found.

Losing and finding.

Being lost and being found.

Life as a searching for meaning and wholeness that involves both losing and finding.

The metaphor of the lost and found is meaningful because most people can relate to it. One can understand completely the fear of being lost, or of losing something precious, and that fear has power over us, but let us also anticipate the other end of the journey.

So in addition to paying attention to the search for lost things or the sense of having been lost like that one sheep that got away, the spiritual life ought also to have room in it for the found things, and for the times when finding is more characteristic of life than losing or being lost is.

In addition to the sense of relief that comes along with finding something that has been lost, let there be a celebration, like the angels in heaven, because finding is part of the spiritual journey too.

Is not life more than what you think it is?

From time to time one hears about people searching for themselves . . . In a way that is what the whole religious enterprise is about.

May we be found in God's grace and mercy, cradled in God's sacrificial love.

And may we also find our way in the search for the self that underlies each human life, that having been loved and forgiven and richly blessed, we might also love and forgive, and strive to be a blessing, no matter how much it stretches us, so that we too may be like this shepherd or this woman who could not help but call the neighbors and rejoice because of life's found things.

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