

9-22-19 SERMON CCI Luke 15: 1- 24 Coming Home

Lost is a word we've all experienced. Anyone lost something last week and had to search for it? Anyone lost your glasses only to find them on the top of your head when you looked in the mirror? Or had to search for your lost keys, which always seems to happen when you're already running late? Or you're carrying a letter to put in the mail, when you get a phone call, and then when you hang up, you can't find where you put the letter? We lose things all the time.

It's not only things that get lost; people do too. Anyone ever get lost as a child and not know the way back home or back to where you last saw your parents? It's frightening. And oh the joy and hugs, when you are found and safe again. Or perhaps we remember back in the day when we used maps before we had a GPS voice to tell us where to turn, and we were driving down a long highway and missed a turn and after awhile we realized we didn't know where we were. Or being lost on a hike after getting separated from the others. We can feel lost after our spouse dies and we're not sure who we are if we're not a husband or wife. Our daughter wrote a beautiful poem called, "Am I Still a Sister?" after her brother died. We can feel lost at work and wonder how we can do this unsatisfying job all day everyday until we retire. Retired people can lose their purpose in life when they finally have the free time they always wanted. We can all feel lost at times.

We've heard 3 of Jesus' parables this morning about being lost and then found. Jesus told these parables after some Pharisees had complained to one another that Jesus was willing to share meals with disreputable types like tax collectors and other sinners. Everyone knew that "bad company corrupts good character," but Jesus welcomed anyone who wanted to learn about God to come. And if the time got late and those sinners still had questions, Jesus invited them to join him for dinner! The Pharisees wouldn't be seen with such people. They weren't worth their time and money. They weren't righteous enough to be their dinner guests.

It's important to remind ourselves that the Pharisees were wealthy Jewish leaders who have been called the most righteous people who have ever lived. They not only followed Moses' law to the t, they did more. They tithed more, prayed louder and longer, everyone knew when they were fasting because they looked like the suffering-for-God people they tried to be. They washed their hands just the right way before meals and would never sit next to someone who wasn't as cultured and clean as themselves. They saw their wealth as evidence of God's

blessing their tremendous righteousness. So when Jesus dared to invite the scum of society to dinner to talk about God, they got angry.

And in response Jesus told these 3 parables. We heard the first one as our Call to Worship. It was about a sheep rancher who owned 100 sheep and discovered one was lost. And he asked the Pharisees who often were the businessmen in town who owned the cattle and sheep and goats on the hills, "Wouldn't that owner leave the 99 in the care of shepherd and go search for the lost sheep?" And those businessmen all nodded their heads because of course, they would. Losing that sheep could cost them revenue at sheep shearing or butchering time. It's good business to keep track of all your business product for future sales. "And when the owner found the lost sheep wouldn't he bring it home on his shoulders and hold a party to celebrate?" And again, everyone nodded their heads. "I tell you there is more rejoicing at heaven's party when one sinner repents than over all the 99 righteous ones who haven't needed to repent. And the people heard and nodded their heads; when the odds are 100 to one, they got it.

We watched Al and Dorothy perform Jesus' second parable about the lost coin. A woman who had 10 silver coins but unfortunately, she had lost one. She was poor enough that her house had no window so she had to light a lamp to see. Those ten coins were worth about 10 days' pay so finding that lost coin was critical. And the people nodded their heads, "Yes, she has to find it." And so the woman searched, and cleaned and when she found the lost coin she called her friends and neighbors to celebrate. Even though her party probably cost the value of her lost coin. Jesus says, that's how God and his angels are. They don't care about the cost; they party every time a lost sinner repents and is found. And the people heard and nodded their heads; yes, when the odds are 10 to one, they got it.

The video told the third parable of the Lost Son about two to one odds. A man had two sons. One day the younger son asked his father for his inheritance- not when his father eventually died, but now. Not caring whether his father might need it as he got older. It was a stunningly insulting thing to do. It was like wishing his father was dead. But the father divided the inheritance between his two sons. And off the younger son went to live life on his own in a far country. No parents to please, no neighbors to avoid. Freedom. And the money burned a hole in his pocket, he spent it doing whatever he pleased, and his new found friends flocked

to the new person in town willing to share the wad of bills in his pocket. It was party time!

But eventually, the money ran out and worse, a famine came and he had no way to feed himself except to get himself hired to feed a Gentile man's pigs. Everyday, he was hungry while the pigs had enough to eat. Everyday, he was thirsty while the pigs had water to drink. And there in the filthy pig sty where no Jewish person would ever allow themselves to be, they would rather die to touch a pig, the young man came to his senses. He would be better off at his father's house as just a hired worker in the fields. Forget being his son, just let him be a hired worker. He would go home, admit he had been wrong, and beg his father's forgiveness. So off he went toward home.

But his father had been watching for him to come home and when he saw him, he ran out to meet him. He warmly greeted this lost son who had insulted him, had preferred his inheritance over his own father, and had wasted all he had been given, he greeted him with an embrace. Gave him a kiss, the sign of forgiveness. Gave him a robe, the sign of honor. Gave him a ring, the sign of authority. Put sandals on his feet, the sign of freedom. Because only a slave went barefoot. Threw a feast with all the neighbors, the sign of a joyful welcome. Like the man who found his lost sheep and the woman who found her lost coin, this father had to celebrate! For his son once was dead and was alive again. He once was lost but now he's found. Like the angels in heaven's party, they celebrated for no one is so lost they cannot be found if they turn toward home.

Three parables about being lost and then found. And about celebrating that the lost have been found. Like all of Jesus' parables, these parables have a twist designed to catch us. Next Sunday we read the end of the parable because it has a twist too. But for today, think about the people sitting around Jesus' table listening. Think about the sinners who had probably heard the Pharisees muttering their complaint that Jesus welcomed them, nothing poor trashy sinners. What did they hear? That even they could be welcomed by the Father and celebrated like a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son that have been found. That being lost **is** about sin because the parties in heaven are for sinners who repent, but that Jesus also paints it another way: being lost is about our relationship, our heart connection, with God. And who is lost or found is not as obvious as some want to think. Which group at that table had their hearts turned toward God- the ones considered sinners who were hungry to hear more about God or the supposed righteous? Can a righteous person be lost too?

The Bible is clear that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 tells us that “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, (there’s that lost sheep image) each of us has turned to our own way.” The good news is that like the lost son, the way back to the Father begins with the realization that we’ve lost our way. Admitting we’ve strayed. The hardest step is the first one, but start home, and God will meet you. Are you hungry? Come home. Are you thirsty? Come home. Are you weary? Come home. If you’ve never given your life to God, come home. If you’re already a Christian, but you’ve drifted away from a closeness to God, come home. If you’ve lost the joy you once had in serving, come home. If you long for a new start, come home. Like the lost son found, the Father is on the portals, watching and waiting, ready to run to welcome us home. So if you feel the Spirit tugging at your heart, come home.

As we pray together in a moment, there will be a time for silent prayer. If you need to come home, I invite you to repent, turn around, right where you are, and come home. As we sing our hymn of response, if you want someone to pray with, come forward. Today can be the day we start a party in heaven because some sinners have come home.