

Seeking and Finding – the God Who Is

Good morning church.

I want to start this morning by coming back to where I ended last Sunday. *Or maybe where I **wish** I'd ended.*

If you were here last Sunday or listened on line, you might know what I mean.

I'm sure we all have sermons that stick with us more than others – for good reasons and sometimes for **unfortunate** reasons.

Last week was one of those Sundays and sermons **for me** that lingered – in an unsatisfying way.

Not in a "beat-myself-up", "I'm a bad-pastor/preacher" sort of way, but in a "*oh God, I wish I had said that a bit differently*" sort of way.

Not that I regret what I shared. It's what I didn't share that has hung with me.

Now, if you were here, you'll know that part of last Sunday for me was the fact that I was still recovering from an infection and so I was pretty weak, which left me a little less able to think on my feet and discern the movements of my own heart.

And in bringing this up, I'm not secretly hoping that some of you will grab me afterwards and tell me that last Sunday's message was

fine or great or anything. I know that God spoke through His Word *and through me* and I'm thankful for that.

But still... I want to come back to where I ended – or, as I said, where I wish I'd ended.

Because last Sunday, we spent our time attending to Jesus' words in **Mark 8:27f** – where, in the wake of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus, for the first time, breaks the news that in the coming days he would suffer, be rejected, and killed. And that this was integral to His being the Messiah – to His saving the world.

Though they could not make sense of this.

And with this, he said that those who want to be His disciples must **also deny themselves and take of their cross and follow Him.**

And so we spent some time considering together the reality that **following Jesus is costly.** That the cost of discipleship **is** great.

But, as Jesus goes on to say: **the cost of non-discipleship, of not following Jesus, is even greater.**

Mark 8:36 – **Jesus says, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"**

And so my teaching focused in on this – this sobering reality that we can't ignore. The reality and possibility of **forfeiting our soul** – which, as we clarified then – refers not simply to some wispy ethereal eternal piece of our hidden heart – but actually refers to our very life

itself – our soul, our life, our self (all good translations of the same greek word).

"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

And in the light of this, I invited us to realize that this is why Jesus calls us **to actually follow Him**, and not just to believe in Him and otherwise go on pursuing the Good Life on our own terms. Because to do so means to forfeit our soul.

And Jesus loves us more than that. The gospel is better than that. And so He calls us to **follow Him** – that He might lead us to a better life – Life in Him.

Which is all true and important for us to hear and know and respond to...

But still, despite all that, I walked away unsettled – for your sake, for ours, for the sake of the hurting and wayward in us and among us, for the sake of the searching and struggling among us – concerned that the primary message we walked away with might have been some version of **"Make sure you don't forfeit your soul... It's possible to believe in Jesus and still forfeit your soul, so follow Jesus and don't lose your soul!"**

And yes, Jesus' warning is real and true and needed – and His counsel is truly good counsel.

But more than good counsel, when it comes to **lost things** – whether the lost in us, the lost that is us or someone around us or our world – we need to know, more than anything else, that Jesus has **good news** for us – and it's this – that **God is a God who seeks and restores the lost.**

Are you lost? Is there a part of you that is lost to God and His life?

Know this: *God is a God who seeks and restores the lost.*

Last Sunday, we even referenced the parable of the prodigal sons in **Luke 15** – as two glimpses of the **forfeited soul** – in both the younger brother and the elder brother.

But the point of the parable is not primarily about the reality and possibility of a forfeited soul or a lost soul – but the point of the parable is revelation of the Father's heart and passion and pursuit **to seek and find and restore lost things** – including **lost** people.

In truth, whenever Jesus talks about lost things, the gospel is always around the corner, always the next word, always the most important word.

Not just good counsel, but good news – about God – which is good news for us.

If you have a Bible with you, turn with me to **Luke chapter 15** – where Jesus tells some of the most famous parables ever told –

three parables about lost things – the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons (often referred to as the parable of the prodigal sons).

Now it's a long chapter, so let me just read the first ten verses for us – **Luke 15:1-10.**

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
Then Jesus told them this parable.*

Let's stop there for a moment.

We tend to read these first two verses as just the run up to the real goods of **Luke 15**, but here already the **gospel for lost things** – **the gospel of God** – is on display for us boldly.

And in case we don't catch it, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law point it out to us with their muttering. "**This man [JESUS]** welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In the eyes of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, and virtually everyone in Jesus' days, **these people** – these people gathering around Jesus were and are the lost.

They are **lost**.

In the sense of *no-chance-of-finding-a-way-home* **lost**.

Off-the-map-and-irretrievable **lost**.

Gone-to-the-far-country-and-burned-their-ships-**lost**.

Unrecoverable.

Unredeemable.

Not worth the energy.

Lost.

According the Pharisees and teachers of the law, and virtually everyone in Jesus' days, **these people** were and **are** lost.

And yet in Jesus they find **welcome**.

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

And because of this – because Jesus knew that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were convinced that **God** regarded these people as lost – unrecoverable, unredeemable, not worth the energy – **Jesus told them these parables.**

*"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses **one** of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'*

*I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over **one** sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

What a picture of God Jesus gives here! A God who goes after the lost sheep – who scours the country-side, the open country, the woods, the ravines, the far country, searching every nook and cranny "until he finds it"!

Who knows if the sheep even knows it's lost – **but the Shepherd does – the Good Shepherd does** – and in this knowledge

and in love, He actively searches and seeks what is lost *"till he finds it."*

What a beautiful, what a breathtaking and inspiring vision of God Jesus has – that many of us need.

(v.6) *"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins [each worth a day's wages] and loses **one**. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over **one** sinner who repents."*

Again, what a picture of God Jesus gives here! A God who lights a lamp (which for someone with only **10** silver coins, this is a costly lamp lighting – this is no flicking on the light switch, this is a costly choice). ***But this is what God does*** – He lights a lamp and flips up the house, gets down on all fours to look under that couch and that rug, digs behind the cushions, practically takes apart the house *"until he finds"* what was lost.

I love how in both parables **lost** does **not** mean irretrievable, damaged, undesirable or worthless. It simply means *something that is not where it is supposed to be – something that is not where it is meant to be – something that is out of place – **that God wants** - that **God loves** and that, in love, He goes after... Something that God desperately wants and passionately seeks to bring home and restore...*

According to Jesus, who speaks with some authority, this is one of God's greatest joys – to seek and restore the lost...

It's what He is up to all the time – **including right now.**

And I hope we recognize that in these parables, Jesus always ends up talking about **repentance** – that this is key to **being found.**

But the danger is that we'd interpret this to mean that being found starts with us... with **our** returning – **our** turning back.

But it doesn't.

Repentance – our turning, or our **returning** – is simply and always only **our response** to the God who, in love and grace, has already come in pursuit of us.

Repentance is the raised hand that surrenders to the calling of the loving Father... **Repentance is** our giving in to the loving pursuit of the Father who alone knows where we are, where we've been, and the way home...

Even in the parable of the prodigal sons, when the younger brother, off in the far country, "*comes to his senses*" and decides to come home – he does so only because His remembrance of the Father's love and care and generosity has finally won him over and brought him to his senses.

Repentance, which brings incredible joy to the Father's heart, is simply **our surrender, our response** to the loving pursuit of the God who first loved and sought us.

This is what Jesus tells us and shows us in **Luke 15**.

But it's not just a story we find in Luke 15.

In truth, this is **the story of God** from start to finish.

This is **the story of the world** – of history – of humanity – from start to finish...

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

And He made it good.

According to Genesis 1, God – a Good and Beautiful God – created a good and beautiful world – that it would flourish with and under His reign and care. And God created us – humanity – women and men – to enjoy this good and beautiful creation and to share together in God's good care of the world...

But in short order, according to Genesis, it all began to fall apart – as Adam and Eve chose, in a way, to get lost – **to displace themselves** from their grace-given place as creations and creatures under God and instead sought to take God's place in their own lives and world...

And as a result, all hell began to break lose *& so much was lost.*

Adam and Eve's relationship **with God** – this beautiful unbroken communion with God, alive in the goodness of His world, was lost – replaced by distrust and distance. Their relationship **with one another** was shattered by blame, deception and domination. Their relationship **with creation** – this beauty and fruitful reciprocity of care and provision – was interrupted and was now marked by frustration, fracture and unfruitful labor. And their relationship **with their very selves** was broken too – marked by fear and shame and hiding.

By **Genesis 3**, so much is already lost and as the chapters unfold, it just seems to get worse.

But, instead of walking away, within pages, **the gospel of God** – a God who seeks and restores the lost – begins to be revealed – as God – **the Seeking God** – draws near to a man named Abram (Gen 12) and begins to reveal His desire and plan to seek and restore what was lost... **through Abram and His descendants**. And the story of Israel and the Old Testament begins.

Not with Abram seeking God, but with God seeking Abram.

Reflecting on the Genesis story, John Stott years ago made the observation (and pardon the gender-exclusive language. This was written years ago). **He remarks**, "Before man stirs himself to seek God, God sought man. In the Bible, we do not see man groping after God; we see God reaching after man."

Seeking out Abram and Sarah. Choosing and calling Israel as His own – for the sake of all ... That **through them** this Seeking God would reveal Himself and rescue and redeem what was lost...

This is where the Story of God and the world begins – and this is where it is leading.

Hear the words of Jesus in **Revelation 21:5** (one of the last chapters of the Bible). We read,

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

"Behold, I am making all things new."

Do you hear that?

He **doesn't** say that He is making **all new things** – in other words, throwing everything out and starting from scratch.

No, He says that He is making **all things new**.

Redeeming, renewing and restoring what was once lost and ruined by sin and the fall.

This is the story of the world. Not the story of a lost world seeking God, but the story of a God who in love seeks the lost.

And we hear this story most clearly in Jesus.

As Jesus Himself says in **Luke 19:10** – *"The Son of Man has come..."*

Why? For what purpose? To what end?

"To seek and save the lost."

This is what Jesus has come to do because **this is what God is like** – **He is a God who loves the lost**, and who, in love, turns the house upside-down in the pursuit of what is lost... to restore what is lost...

But even more incredible than that – this is what Jesus has come to do **because this is who Jesus is.**

He is the God who seeks us.

He is the God who has come after us.

The God who knows where we are, where we've been and the way home.

And not only that, not only is He the One who knows the way home, but He is **the One in Whom we are finally truly Home.**

No longer lost, but found.

And home.

Alive and well in the arms of God, under the reign of God.

This is the gospel.

Because this is who God is...

Over the last week, as I've reflected on all this, I've often found myself with a particular **call and response** playing in the back of my mind – I'm sure many of us know it.

Marco! (Polo).

And if we're honest, life with God can feel at times like one big game of Marco-Polo – where we are constantly calling out "**Marco**" – in hopes that God will answer "**Polo**"!

And yet **in Luke 15** and, even more so, **in Jesus**, we realize that it's the other way around. That God is the One calling to us – seeking us – searching the pool for us.

And the question is whether WE will answer.

Will we come out from hiding and let ourselves be found by the God who Is – the God who is seeking us?

Will we admit we're lost apart from Jesus and let ourselves be found?

Will you?

Will we stop **shouting** "Marco" to a god of our making – the god who **isn't** (the god we want to control, the god we want to do things our way), and start **answering** "polo" to the God who is. The God who is seeking us. The God revealed in Jesus... Who alone know where we are, where we've been and the way home – to Himself and ourselves in Him... ***And who wants to bring us home...***

Invitation to the Lord's Table -----

This morning, as ever, the Father is seeking us – inviting us in
and through Jesus to surrender, to repent, to answer and let ourselves
be found...

And to come today to the Table as an expression of our need
and desire **to be found in and by Jesus** – again today.