

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Lost and found

Does God care about the rebels and the 'sinners'?

Scripture: Luke 15:1-32

Rev. Steve Filyk

March 7, 2021

Communion Sunday

Opening Hymn: Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Closing Hymn: #485: Saviour, like a shepherd lead us

Communion Hymn: Psalm 23 (Townend)

Choruses: Jesus loves me (with additional verse) Amazing Grace (my chains are gone)

You can find them at schools.

You can find them at skating rinks.

You can find them at swimming pools.

Sometimes they are small,

The size of a milk crate.

Some of them are big enough to jump into.

What am I talking about?

The lost and found.

Most of the time

We ignore these clothing and accessory graveyards.

But when our children or grandchildren

Have mislaid their winter coat

Or misplaced the third set of mittens...

But when we have dropped our driving gloves

Or forgotten that new travel mug,

These are the places we turn to.

Most of us have experienced the relief, the euphoria

That comes from recovering something a simple

As a lost pair of swim goggles

or something essential as our car keys.

It is amazing how the recovery of a \$10 toque

can make you feel whole again,

and change your entire day.

PAUSE

In today's lesson from the Gospel of Luke

We encounter a triplet of parables

About things that are lost and found.

This first parable is about a farm animal.  
 Jesus invites us to imagine  
     A shepherd scouring the fields  
     For a lamb that has wandered away.

While Jesus' image is rural,  
 Most urbanites who own pets  
     Share the experience of a curious creature  
     Who leaves the safety of home.

Most of us know what it is like  
     To desperately search for a cat or dog  
     That has gone wandering.

And just like Jesus' parable we too know the joy  
     Of finding what was lost,  
     Whether that cat has gone up a tree  
     Or the dog has wandered into a neighbor's yard.

When we lose our animals,  
     We lose something of ourselves.  
     We aren't complete or whole  
     Until what has been lost is found.

When the shepherd of Jesus' story  
     Find the lost lamb, he celebrates.

And we are just as likely  
     to joyfully tell our friends and neighbors  
     That our lost pet has been found.

But Jesus doesn't stop there.  
     Jesus goes on to tell another parable  
     This time about losing money.

More and more often  
     Today's transactions are electronic.

But most of us still know what it is like  
     To hold on to cash or a check.

And most of us know what it is like  
     To misplace some money:  
     Whether it is an envelope filled with a few 20s,  
     Or a check worth thousands.

In the parable Jesus tells  
     A woman has lost a coin,  
     The equivalent of a day's wages.

So what does she do  
 When she realises what it missing?

She turns her house upside-down.

In a day before electricity  
 She lights a lamp and searches all night.

She searches till she discovers  
 how that coin has rolled under the table  
 and wedged itself into a crack by the wall.

You can imagine her relief when she spies that lost coin.

It's the same relief we have when we  
 Find the check in the recycle bin,  
 Or when we discover that \$50 being used as a bookmark.

When we gather with friends the next morning for coffee  
 there is enough residual relief  
 To spur us to pick up the entire tab.

Jesus has told two parables.  
 They are easy to relate to.

Most of us know joy of find a lost pet.  
 Most of us know the joy of finding lost money.

But Jesus' third parable is different.

We have grace for the animal  
 that wanders into the neighbour's yard.  
 We have forgiveness for ourselves  
 when we misplace our own money.

But what are we to make of people  
 Who walk away from their community,  
 Who reject their church, their families?

Will we welcome their return?  
 Will we celebrate their homecoming?

Jesus tells us a story about a man who has two sons.

The younger one wants to travel and experience the world.  
 But like most young people his ambition  
 Is bigger than his bank account.

So what does he do?  
 He asks for his share of the Father's estate.

Remember that this story comes from a Middle Eastern culture  
 Where things were much different:  
 People stayed with their families.

As for work,  
 Young people were apprenticed into the family business.

As for home life,  
 Parents raised their children.  
 And the children were expected to care for their parents,  
 when the parents grew old.

“Upon the father’s death,  
 the younger son would have a “right”  
 to one-third of his father’s estate...

If the father chose,  
 he could divide the inheritance while he was still alive,  
 [but the heir would] inherit the responsibility  
 to care for the family until the father’s death.

But [this] younger son wanted his inheritance  
 without the responsibility it would entail.”<sup>i</sup>

While this request was breaking a social contract,  
 Nevertheless, the father grants it.

The youngest son is given his inheritance.  
 And it goes with him,  
 as it goes with most young people  
 Who are given freedom and lots of money.

We are told that younger son “set off for a distant country  
 And there squandered his wealth in wild living”.<sup>ii</sup>

When famine hits,  
 He is a long way from home,  
 Vulnerable and destitute.

The only work he can find is tending pigs,  
 Which for a Jew who considered the animals unclean,  
 Would be hitting rock bottom.

Hanging out with the pigs  
 Gives him lots of time to reflect  
 on how good he had it back home.  
 Even the servants were well fed.

And so decides to journey back, to confess his sins,  
 And beg for a lowly place.

His father would still be hurt,  
 His father would still be angry,  
 But maybe, just maybe,  
 he'd find some love in his heart.

This of course, is where the story gets really interesting.

We are told that as the younger son approaches the homestead from a distance  
 That his father recognises him, his gait, his movement.  
 And the father is filled with compassion.

Recognising his son's humiliation  
 As he makes the 'walk of shame' past the old neighbors,  
 The father does what no other Middle Eastern father would do.

He runs to his son.

The father then embraces him and kisses him  
 As a public declaration of reconciliation.  
 All before the son can get a word out.<sup>iii</sup>

What follows is a celebration.  
 The son is clothed and a feast is declared.

The details are all important.

"The best robe was the father's robe.  
 The signet ring was a sign of restored authority and responsibility.  
 The shoes were a sign that he was indeed a son, not a servant.

The killing of the fatted calf was a sign that the whole community  
 was invited to celebrate the restoration of the relationship.

The unexpected, extravagant display of grace  
 in restoring his son is accounted for by the father's own words:

"Let us eat and celebrate;  
 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again;  
 he was lost and is found!"<sup>iv</sup>

PAUSE

I mentioned the third parable was different.

We have grace for the animal  
 that wanders into the neighbours yard.  
 We have grace for ourselves when we misplace  
 A cheque or a watch or a bracelet.

But what are we to make of people  
     Who reject their community,  
         Who rebel against the church,  
             Who spurn their own family?

What are we to make of people  
     Who chose to live in ways that are hurtful  
         Not just to their own families  
             But society itself?

Jesus tells these parables as a way to respond  
     To those who had questions about the company he was keeping:  
         How he was spending time with sinners,  
             Even breaking bread with them.

Jesus is reminding all those older brothers and sisters  
     that God's heart is broken over those who are lost.

Jesus is declaring that God will welcome back the rebels  
     And receive them as God's children.

Jesus is affirming that God has been searching for these 'sinners'  
     since the day they left home.

Of course the deeper truth is that we are all prodigals.  
     We don't need to travel to distant countries  
         To dishonor our heavenly father, or reject God's ways.

The Good News,  
     The joyful news  
         is that God seeks reconciliation.

We see this in Jesus and the company he was keeping,  
     The life that he lived,  
         And the stories that he told.

Like the father he will bear the cost of our rebellion.  
     Like the father he will endure shame so that we can be spared it.  
         He will open the door so that we can come home.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>i</sup> Roger E. Van Harn "Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32" *The Lectionary Commentary, the Gospels* 407

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 15:13 NIV

<sup>iii</sup> See Roger E. Van Harn "Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32" *The Lectionary Commentary, the Gospels* 409

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid 410