

Today’s lesson is read from Luke 15:1-10

**Hear the words from Luke:**

Read Luke 15:1-10

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

**“Thanks be to God”**

Let us pray:

O Lord, let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Intro:

As Luke sets the scene, Jesus is in trouble once again for hanging out with the wrong people. As “all the tax collectors and sinners” come near to listen to him, the Pharisees and scribes begin to grumble and complain saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

In response, Jesus tells the outraged religious insiders two parables. In the first, a shepherd leaves his flock of ninety-nine to look for a single lamb that is lost. He searches until he finds it, and when he does, he carries that one lamb home on his shoulders, invites his friends and neighbors over, and throws a party to celebrate.

In the second, a woman loses one of her ten silver coins. Immediately, she lights a lamp and sweeps her entire house, looking carefully for the coin until she finds it. Then, like the shepherd, she calls together her friends and neighbors and asks them to celebrate the recovery of the coin: “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.”

The first thing that strikes me about these parables is how many years I spent misreading them. For a long time, I thought that the lost lamb and the lost coin represented sinners “out there.” Out there beyond the home country I call Christianity,

beyond the range of God, the Church, and me. But no. The lost lamb in the first parable belongs to the shepherd’s flock from the very beginning of the story — it is his lamb. Likewise, the coin in the second parable belongs to the woman before she loses it; the coin is one of her very own. In other words, these parables are not about lost outsiders finding salvation and becoming Christians. These parables are about us, the insiders. The people in the know. The church-goers, the communion consumers, the Bible readers, the prayer chain warriors. These are parables about being lost on the inside.

What does this mean? Well, it means that getting lost isn’t an experience only exclusive to non or not-yet Christians. Getting lost happens to God’s people too. Getting lost can happen to us within these four walls and it can happen to us within the community we try to be outside this church. Ironically, getting lost can find us no matter where we are. We cannot hide from getting lost.

Over the past couple of weeks I’ve been chipping away at my ordination papers and one of the questions I’ve spent a lot of time on has been to describe my personal experience of God. This requires me to look back over my life and explain my story of getting lost and being found over and over again. In other words it has been a retelling of how God has saved me and how I am assured of that salvation.

And we all have our own story of experiences with God and what it means to be saved and to be assured of salvation. To know that after feeling lost and alone, we’ve been found by God. To know that after feeling worthless, we’ve been redeemed.

We’ve all experienced that strange warmth unexpectedly come over us the same way it did John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist movement, as evident in his own experience at Aldersgate Street. The moment he felt he could trust his life in Christ’s

hands alone and that He had been saved him from his sin and death. Thank God for that moment! Amen?

But, just because we have been saved the one time, does it mean we will always be saved? Do we United Methodists believe “once saved, always saved” or can we “lose our salvation”? Can we be lost, become found, and then become lost again? Can we lose our sense of belonging, can we lose our capacity to trust, can we lose our felt experience of God’s presence, can we lose our will to persevere? Can some of us get lost when illness descends on our lives and God’s goodness starts to look not-so-good? Can some of us get lost when death comes too soon and too suddenly for someone we love, and we experience a crisis of faith that leaves us reeling? Can some of us get lost when our marriages die? Can some of us get lost when our children break our hearts? Can some of us get lost in the holds of addiction, or anxiety, or lust, or unforgiveness, or hatred, or bitterness?

Can some of us get lost very close to home — within the very walls of this Church? Can we get lost when prayer turns to dust in our mouths? When the Scriptures we once loved lie dead on the page? When sitting in a pew on a Sunday morning makes our skin crawl? When even the most well-intentioned sermon sucks the oxygen out of our lungs? When the table of bread and wine that once nourished us now leaves us hungry, cranky, bewildered, or bored?

Once saved, always saved? No! We get lost. We get so miserably lost that the shepherd has to wander through the rough wilderness to find us. We get so wholly lost that the housewife has to light her lamp, pick up her broom, and sweep out every nook and cranny of her house to discover what’s become of us.

Can we pause for a moment and take in how astonishing this is? That God is genuinely concerned and worried when it comes to our lostness? God experiences authentic, real-time loss. God searches, God persists, God lingers, and God treads. God wanders over hills and valleys looking for his lost lamb. God turns the house upside down looking for his lost coin. And when at last God finds what God is looking for, God cannot contain the joy that wells up inside. So God invites the whole neighborhood over, shares the happy news of recovery, and throws a party to end all parties.

And this is sometimes so hard for me to believe that I’m worth looking for. That I’m not expendable. That I’m loved enough and desired enough to warrant a long, hard, diligent search. It’s so hard to trust that God won’t give up on me. That God does God’s best work when I’m utterly lost and unable to find myself. That God will feel so much joy at my recovery that he’ll tell the whole world the good news, and throw us all a party.

But this is in fact the case. Jesus tells these parables to religious insiders who won’t admit to their own lostness. He shares these stories with folks who can’t let go of their brand of goodness with Jesus’s bewildering claim that lostness has its own merits. Barbara Brown Taylor makes a strong case for these merits and virtues of lostness. She argues that lostness makes us “stronger at the edges and softer at the center.” Lostness teaches us about vulnerability. About empathy. About humility. About patience. Lostness shows us who we really are, and who God really is.

HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CELLPHONE IS RIGHT NOW?

**IT’S BOUND TO BE FOUND. YOU CANNOT LOSE WHAT YOU LOVE**

HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CARKEYS ARE RIGHT NOW?

**IT’S BOUND TO BE FOUND. YOU CANNOT LOSE WHAT YOU LOVE**

HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR DEBIT CARD IS RIGHT NOW?

**IT’S BOUND TO BE FOUND. YOU CANNOT LOSE WHAT YOU LOVE**

HOW MANY OF YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE WITH GOD RIGHT NOW?

**YOU’RE BOUND TO BE FOUND. GOD CANNOT LOSE WHAT GOD LOVES**

Let us pray:

I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see. The truth is God, my lostness isn’t over. Lostness remains a central feature of my relationship with you God, and a big part of my conversion story. God continue to look for us when our lostness is so convoluted and so profound. We thank you that even in that bleak and hopeless place, You find us. This is amazing grace. And it is ours. Love so amazing we can stumble, fall away, get lost, but always be found in Your loving arms. Amen.