

# “Being Found”

Luke 15:1-10, 1 Timothy 1:12-17

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**Prayer for Understanding** Lord Jesus, we want to be people who perceive you, savor your love and grow in you, to be among those in whom the power of your hope is at work and who confess you in word and deed. Awaken us, Lord. Do not let us sleep. You speak your powerful word always anew throughout the ages. Give us ears to hear! Amen.

A newspaper ad stated: "Lost: dog. Brown fur. Some of it missing due to mange. Blind in one eye, partially deaf. Limp because of recent automobile accident. Slightly arthritic. Answers to the name of 'Lucky.'" That sounds ironic. But in fact that mangy, half-blind, partially deaf, limping, arthritic old dog was lucky. Somebody loved him and wanted him back! We also are loved and sought by God when we are quite unlovely.

We are all lucky for God loves us. God is getting us back. God is working in our lives enabling us to discover the joy of being found. Jesus said. **Luke 15:1-10 NRSV** “Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

We are all lost in numerous ways. Life is a journey in which Jesus is continuing to help us find the joys God has created and is eager for us to accept. God is like a parent who found the perfect gift for their child and is delighted in giving, in watching their child unwrapping, discovering and savoring the gift.

God helped me to be “more found” on my mini-sabbatical. Growing up on a dairy farm filled me with wonder. Tiny seeds bursting forth and yielding abundant crops, the beauty of the land, the rhythm of the seasons, the details of creation in an insect, a rock, a stalk of corn – the grandeur of creation in stars, the wind, and creation teaming with life.

My routine of endless tasks dulls my wonder. God immersed me in wonder in Glacier National Park. We hiked across amazing alpine meadows bursting with an array of colors and smells. There were plants in shapes, colors, and scents I had never experienced before. We saw the power of a moose, big horn sheep, and a grizzly bear. We giggled at a baby mountain goat frolicking with her family. We marveled at the size and ruggedness of the mountains, so huge that we played in their shadows, miles away, hours before sunset. The dazzling colors of the sunrise greeted us for an hour every morning as it slowly moved up the mountain face. We saw spectacular lakes of every size, color, and vantage point: on the surface were towering trees surrounding the crystal clear water allowing you to see effortlessly all the way to the bottom and the darting fish. We saw lakes from the side of the mountain as it reflected the scenery at times, sparkled, and sometimes erupted with white caps. We saw lakes from mountain tops as the squiggled off the horizon. Depending on the angle and the activity of the glacier some lakes were blue, others aquamarine, and others turquoise. Some lakes were warm, inviting a swim: others were cradling icebergs taking your breath away. We delighted in trees of every shape and form, majestic cedars, windblown pine with branches all huddled on one side, intriguing trees with black sparkling pine cones, trees that grew out of tiny crevices, others from precarious cliffs. We delighted in rocks of every size, shape, color, density, texture, and design even revealing fossils millions of years old. On a 90 degree day we enjoyed a cooling hike on a glacier marveling at the volume of rock the glacier was moving. The glacier was even transporting tons of rock across a lake. We hiked on the side of cliffs so steep we had to hold onto cables, on exposed ridges where the wind gusted to 70 mph causing us to dig in our trekking poles and huddle together waiting for the wind to subside, so we could take a few more steps. Water was constantly at play--raging rivers, tumbling waterfalls,

gurgling brooks, gentle path side showers. The sun was intense, warming your skin; the wind and shade stimulating goosebumps; and the spray of water refreshing. Playing outdoors caused every flavor to robustly pop and satisfy. We savored a new taste, huckleberries. I found an entire new wonder, outdoor rock climbing—the comfy feel of the texture of the rock, a puzzle of tactile facets to be sequenced, balanced and explored, the safety of the rope, the elation of reaching the top, each summit with a unique view. God serenaded us with a symphony of rain, thunder, hail, critters, wind, and silence. We laid on our backs and the stars seemed to touch us, the band of the Milky Way glowed, and every minute another shooting star ran across the sky. Surely God has filled creation with abundant delights enough, so we can discover a new one every moment of our life.

All of us enjoyed abundant wonder as a child. Sadly wonder often gets lost as we journey through life. Although wonder is all around us and in us, pains, worries and fears often deaden our awareness of wonder. God created the world to fill us with wonder, joy and delight. Pastor John Ortberg believes that lack of joy is the most serious sin we face today. Do you need to repent from your lack of wonder? How do you need to be found?

All of us are lost in numerous ways. Our lostness causes a great deal of suffering both as individuals and global – Lost love for all people—Lost delight – Lost appreciation for others—Lost belonging—Lost kindness—Lost wonder--Lost respect for others – Lost curiosity—Lost joy—Lost compassion—Lost peace—Lost health—Lost clarity—Lost passion—Lost hope. The list can go on and on. At the root of all violence, strife, war, depression, pain, isolation, loneliness, suffering is “lostness”.

God keeps finding us. Did you notice all the rejoicing and joy by God, the person being found, all people, heaven and all of creation every time an aspect of being found happens? We are lost - Sometimes because we have run away— Sometimes because we have done mean, violent sinful acts. Human logic expects a response of scolding, a conviction of the lost behavior, a lecture on how to be and remain found, a warning, an “I told you so.” Human logic expects a limit to how many times a person can lose something and have God come running to help us be found again. Human logic expects that we need to do something to be found, to behave a certain way after we are found, to do something to atone for our “lostness”. There is none of that in Jesus’ parables. God and heavens first and only response is joy, rejoicing in every instant, in every way anyone is found.

God finds us and helps us to be more and more found not just for the individual but also for the entire community. The 99 sheep are incomplete without their lost friend. The 9 coins are an incomplete set without the 10<sup>th</sup> coin. Being found is both for the individual and the community. Until all people are found in every way and united with us, all of us are incomplete. Whenever anyone is found in any way God, heaven, and creation rejoices; and we also are invited to rejoice for we have just become a little more whole.

T.M. Luhrmann said. "I saw that people went to church to experience joy and to learn how to have more of it." Pastor Donald Ward said. "We express our joy about [being found] by calling the neighbors for a big party every Sunday. We have a big celebration called worship to come together, to rejoice over the fact that we who have been lost have been and are being found. We find others to join with us in celebration, to come to the party to experience their own "foundness." God finds all that God wants to find. God desires that all are found in every way. Therefore we can be certain that each of us in God's perfect timing will be fully found, and everyone will be reunited with God's family. Our worship is a faint foretaste of the joy of being fully found. In our scripture Jesus keeps going with the theme of being found with the story of the lost sons who are found and reunited.

Saul was certain that he was found and could help the world be found. Saul meditated and tried to live every aspect of the Old Testament. Saul lost tolerance for people with different spiritual views. Saul lost compassion and love. Saul lost appreciation for diversity believing that there was only one way to worship God. Saul lost his patience. His attempts to get people to worship God in his narrow way were failing, so he began persecuting and killing Christians who would not become Jewish. God found Saul and he celebrated his "foundness" by changing his name to Paul. Paul spent the rest of his life discovering and celebrating different ways that God was helping him and others be found. Paul strived to live this joy and wrote volumes on joy, on grace, and on the ways God finds us. Paul discovered and savored the love and grace of God. Paul's passion became helping everyone be found. It mattered not if you were Jew, Gentile, Pagan, Roman, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor, a meat eater or vegetarian, if you strived to follow God's laws or not, or you strived to live God's will or not, for God is grace, God is a finder of the lost.

The Apostle Paul put it this way. **1 Timothy 1:12-17 NRSV "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me**

**faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

Often one has a tendency to make Jesus' parables about our behavior and striving. Jesus has parable about how we should live, those are sermons for another day. Today's parables are primarily about God. These parables illustrate the unfailing love, mercy, and grace of God who goes to extravagant lengths to help each of us be fully found. These parables are about the joy and rejoicing of all of heaven every instant God helps us be found. These are parables of invigorating hope revealing that God will find every precious child, make them whole, and all of the cosmos complete by uniting us all. These are parables to fill you with wonder for God is searching in every plant, animal, and person – in every aspect of the cosmos for ways to help you be more found and united to all in love. These are parables of God's sovereignty to find you, God's forgiveness to purify you, God's power to heal you, God's strength to resurrect you, God's delight in you which causes God to rejoice in every aspect of your "foundness". These parables tell us how lucky we are, for we are like the lost dog—blind, deaf, lame, sick yet lucky because God loves us, God will find us, God will perfect us and all will rejoice for eternity. Amen