

Lost & Found
Series: Everything in Between
Luke 15:1–7
Sunday, March 30, 2025 (Lent 4)

Let us pray: Lord, may your Word be spoken exactly where we need to hear it, so that we can follow the sound of your voice and find our way to you, in Christ. Amen.

Some of you know that we have a new driver in our family. Our son Brandon got his license about a month ago. The other week, he and a friend drove to a basketball game over in Plymouth Meeting. He had never driven to Plymouth Meeting by himself before, so we showed him the exact route we wanted him to take. Take the Turnpike over, so that you avoid 76 and 476. He *did* that and got there without any problem. The game ended around 9:30 p.m., and they started driving home. As a new driver, he has to be off of the road by 11. No problem, they had plenty of time.

Except the GPS on his phone started taking him back on 476. That would have been okay, except that when he came up to the exit for 76, he was in the wrong lane, and next thing he knows, he's on 76 *East* going into Philadelphia. And wouldn't you know it, at that exact time there was an accident on 76, so he's moving along at about 3 mph. He had no idea where he was going or how to get turned back around. He was lost.

Throughout the season of Lent, we have been looking at the dichotomies of life and faith. We live in such a highly polarized time in which so many people view life and faith in terms of binaries – it's black and white, good or bad, right or wrong. It's either all one thing or all the other, with nothing in between. And while that certainly *can* be the case – there are certainly things that are right and wrong, good and bad, things that are factually true and demonstrably false – it's not *always* the case. The truth is not *always* at

one extreme or the other. The world in which we live *is* black and white, and it is *also* blue and green and yellow and red and purple. Life and faith are full of nuance and complexity.

So we have been looking at the dichotomies in some of Jesus' most well-known stories from Luke's gospel to see how God is often present in the *both/and*, not just the *either/or*. We have looked at the dichotomies of stranger and neighbor, where we saw that sometimes the people closest to us can be like strangers to us, and sometimes complete strangers can be neighbors to us. We looked at the dichotomies of faith and works; how faith is about both what we believe *and* what we do, and that our beliefs should *lead us* to action. Last week we looked at the dichotomy of rest and growth and how we *need* rest in order to grow and bear good fruit in this world.

Today we are looking at a dichotomy that gets talked about a lot in our faith – lost and found. And while we have been saying that life and faith are about the *both/and*, not just the *either/or*, this *does* seem like a binary issue. You are either *lost* or you are *found*. You can't be both at the same time. If you lose your keys or your glasses, they are lost until you find them. Once you find them, they are no longer lost. They cannot be both lost *and* found at the same time. So this seems like a pretty clear cut *either/or* issue. Except...

We have an app on our phones that allows us to see where everyone in our family is in real time. So right now, I can pull it up and see exactly where everyone is, how long they've been there, and if they're driving, I can see how fast they're going. When Brandon got lost on 76, he called us, told us what was going on and that he didn't know what to do. So we opened the app, saw where he was, and we were able to walk him through exactly where to go. "Okay, you see this exit coming up on the right for Belmont Ave? You're going to get off here, get in the left lane. Make a left turn here. Now you see the onramp for 76 West. You're going to make a left turn here." All the way until he got up to the exit for 202. *He*

was lost, but we knew exactly where he was, and we were with him every step of the way, leading him back home.

We *can* be both lost and found at the exact same time. We can *feel* like we are lost, but God knows exactly where we are, and God is with us every step of the way, leading us back home.

Jesus tells this parable about the lost sheep. In fact, he tells *three* parables in a row in chapter 15 about being lost and found. The sheep that is lost and found by the shepherd. A woman who loses a coin and searches for it until she finds it. And the parable of the prodigal son, where a son leaves home and ruins his life with bad decisions, but when he comes to an awakening and returns home, and his father says, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” Obviously, Jesus is not just talking about things or people that are *physically* lost and found. That’s not his main point.

Luke starts this story off by telling us that tax collectors and sinners were coming near to Jesus to listen to him. The Jewish religious leaders see this and say, “He welcomes sinners and eats with them!” The obvious implication there is that he should *not* be. He shouldn’t be spending his time with *those* people. He should be spending his time with the good, righteous, faithful people. So, it says, he tells them this parable. “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?” Well, *nobody* would do that. Leave the 99 other sheep alone and unprotected in the wilderness while you go off searching for the one that is lost? You’re putting the other 99 sheep in danger. That would be incredibly irresponsible.

“And when he has found the lost sheep,” he says, “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.’” Who does *that*; calls up their friends and neighbors to celebrate after

finding one lost sheep when you still had 99 others? Your friends and neighbors would probably think you're crazy.

But then Jesus tells us what the point *is*. He says, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance." The *point* is that when we lose our way in life, *God seeks us out* and *rejoices* when we are found. God loves us so extravagantly that God will go to ends that do not make sense to find us and bring us back. Like giving up the eternal glories of heaven to become a human being. Like dying on a cross. *It does not make sense* that God would do that...until you consider that it was done from a place of the deepest love that creation has ever known.

Have *you* ever felt lost? Not *physically*, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally. You've lost your way in life. You don't know where you are. You don't know how you got there. You don't know where you're going. I have. Some of you have heard this story before, but it's been a while since I've shared it, and we have some new people here who I know haven't heard it.

When I was 16, almost 17, I was arrested for something that I did not do. I was *stupid* and made some bad choices, but I didn't do what I was accused of doing. I gave some friends a ride to school each morning, and for some dumb reason this particular morning, I decided to bring a cap gun with me as a prank to scare my friend when he got in the car. Well, on the drive to school, my friend took the cap gun, pointed it out the window at a jogger, and yelled something. The jogger got my license plate and called it in. He said I slowed the car down and moved over closer to him. I didn't, but it didn't matter. I was arrested and charged with being an accomplice to aggravated assault. I was taken out of school in handcuffs, in front of my teachers and friends. I was put in the back of a police car, taken to the police station, fingerprinted and photographed; had to go before a judge.

It felt like my life was completely falling apart. All the plans I had for the future, college, it just felt like I was losing it all. Everything was so out of my control. I was terrified. And no one (except my mom) believed me when I said I didn't do this, so I felt very alone. I was absolutely lost.

One night as I was going to bed, I pulled out my Bible, looking for help anywhere I could find it. I ended up reading Psalm 4, which is a cry to God for help. And it says at one point, "The Lord hears when I call to him." So I called out to God. I said, "God, I don't know what to *do*. I'm so scared. I need your help." And that was *never* me. I grew up going to church on Sundays and saying my prayers at bedtime, but I never had *that* kind of relationship with God. God was like an *idea* that I believed in, but that was about it.

But as I was praying, I had this overwhelming sense that God was *with* me – like physically present in that room with me; the way that when you're standing near someone, you can *feel* their body close to yours. That was how I felt. And I heard somewhere deep within me what I can only describe as the voice of God saying, "I am with you. I love you. And you are going to be okay." Eventually, the truth came out, and everything *was* okay. But that experience changed me forever, because it was the moment I came to know Jesus as the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lone, lost sheep.

We can all lose our way in life and *feel* like we are lost. But we are never *really* lost. Because God is *always* with us, God knows exactly where we are, and God never gives up on us, never stops pursuing us and seeking us out, trying to bring us back. Even when we do not feel *worthy* of God's love. Even when we feel like we are too far gone for God to possibly bring back. The fact that tax collectors and sinners were coming near to Jesus, and Jesus was *welcoming* them and was *eating* with them shows us that you

are never too lost for God to find you. You are never too far gone for Jesus to seek you out and bring you back home.

It's like J.R. Tolkien wrote, "Not all those who wander are lost." Wherever *you* might have wandered, where *you* might feel lost – in life, in faith – you have never wandered too far for God. God sees you. God knows exactly where you are. And God hears when you call. Because God loves you. And God will never give up on you. So call out to God, and trust that the Good Shepherd will find you and bring you back into the fold. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.