

“What Matters to God”  
Pentecost 17, Luke 15:1-10  
September 11, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado  
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### I. LOST? FOUND?

Ever lost anything? Ever *been* lost? Ever found anything, after searching and searching and searching? Or not? Still searching for something—ready for the rejoicing part that comes at the end?

Have you ever lost your way? I don’t mean on a hiking trail or road in the dark at night. Though, those are certainly major life-experiences that stick with us a good long while.

Have you ever just “felt a little lost?” Either because the world is changing too fast around you, or you’ve lost significant people in your life in one way or another? Have you changed and the world around you hasn’t, or your community, your circles?

Or, your priorities, beliefs and values seem to be veering a new direction and you feel like you’re on a road by yourself—a little lost from the guideposts that used to work for you and no longer do?

Have you ever lost your moorings, or lost your sense of self; even lost yourself, during a time of transition and seasonal shift?

### II. JESUS’ LOST & FOUND

Jesus gets this. This Lost and Found business. He is being criticized for wining and dining with those society would deem “lost.” The outcasts, the sinners, the folks of ill repute. The undocumented, the alternative, the folks from the other side of the tracks, the other denomination, the other political party, the other side.

And his response? To challenge their “conventional wisdom” about how the world works. To turn their assumptions and presumptions on their heads.

“Let me tell you about lost and found, you who think you have it all figured out.”

4-7 “Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

8-10 “Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

### III. DOESN’T MAKE ANY SENSE!

And, at face value, those are two nice little stories, with a happy ending, and Jesus makes his point—game over. But, what does this retort have to do with the criticism of his eating with the tax collectors and sinners? The riffraff?

Parables always have a “punch.” A “jostle your logic brain cells” moment. Easy to miss if you don’t pause and ponder.

Something doesn't set quite right in what Jesus is saying, and you have to keep wrestling with it a bit. What *seems* to make perfect sense here really makes no sense at all.

Wait a minute! About that Shepherd—all loving and huggy with the little lamb all draped over his neck. You've seen the pictures. The artwork. There's even one on the front of the bulletin.

Rewind. What did the guy do, when he went off to hunt for that little wayward waif? He left the other 99! All of 'em. He didn't have a coworker, a colleague, a partner from the ranch tagteam with him. He marched right off and abandoned those dudes!

Left them completely unprotected from predators, thieves, natural accidents—you name it! While, silly him, totally irresponsible, went roaming the range for ONE. One dumb, probably-doesn't-deserve-to-be-chased silly sheep! Talk about turn your back on your investment! Or the boss's. Completely, unquestionably irresponsible! No common sense whatsoever!

And then, the little woman. Sure, she's a good housekeeper and all. She leaves no dust bunny unturned, searching for that one silly coin. She knows it's not just a worthless penny—it's a tenth of her wages, and she needs it. But, what does she do when she finally finds it?! (After burning up a gallon of precious oil all night in her obsessive looking, to boot!)

She invites the whole dang neighborhood down for Happy Hour and provides all the food and drink! You know what a quick run to City Market and the Liquor store will cost ya! (IF you can even get there these days ☺) She's just blown that coin—that tenth of her income on a party to celebrate the finding of the coin!

What is the sense in THAT? What is the sense in *any* of this? It's wacky. Definitely shows poor judgment on the part of these finders. What are they thinking?

This is ridiculous!  
What are you trying to say here, Jesus?

That when we're feeling lost, that it's not about us, the lost, or the logical definitions of who is lost and who is found? That the Finder may just go to all sorts of ridiculous measures to find us, search us out, never give up, not follow the rules of logic, prudence and risk-assessment?

#### IV. WE LOSE MANY THINGS AND WAYS

Alyce McKenzie

“One Sunday morning several years ago, on my way into the church our family attended in Pennsylvania, I spotted the Lost and Found box in the entry way and decided to look through it to see if I could find my son's missing blue mitten. There was no blue mitten in it, but there was a pair of glasses in there. A set of keys. A watch.

There is a lot that can show up in the lost and found box of your life lying in there unclaimed while you go about your ministry. It's possible to lose a lot of things and keep on keeping on. You can lose:

Direction Faith Faculties Friend

Focus Ground Hair Hope

Heart Head Keys Mind

Mobility Perspective Respect Spark

Sanity Teeth Temper Touch

Sometimes when you lose something, it's a good strategy to retrace your steps and find the spot where you lost it.

Revisit the stores where you might have left your credit card.

The sink where you took off your wedding band and put in on the soap dish. Retrace your steps.

Where did I mislay my communion time with God in favor of a crammed calendar? Where did we in the church temporarily

misplace our compassion for the poor in favor of programs?

And when your energy is all used up, and gone, that's okay too. Just lie in the corner and God will find you. God will retrieve *you*, too.”

#### V. FOUND JOY

David Lose tells the story of losing sight of his 4-year-old son in a huge amusement park and how he felt as he was reunited with the boy—not too long later, but of course, it felt like an eternity!

He likens his response to a hint of how God might just feel:

“I suppose I could have been mad at him for wandering off, or upset with myself for letting him, or embarrassed that I’d recruited security guards. But to be honest, none of these emotions were mine. No, I was just relieved and, even more, joyful. My son, who had been lost, was found. Safe and sound. Back with me. It was pure joy.

“And that’s how God feels anytime anyone is drawn back into relationship with God, or chooses life, or lives into his or her potential, or helps out another, and in all these ways is found. Joy. Pure joy.

“You see, “these stories aren’t about a lost sheep or coin, not really. They’re about a shepherd who risks everything to go look, and about a woman who sweeps all night long to find. These stories are about a God who will always go looking for God’s lost children, even more fervently than I went looking for Jack.”

“And, these are very ordinary people— a shepherd who stands at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder in first-century Palestine, a woman with only ten silver coins to her name. Reminders that God often works through ordinary people to do the extraordinary work of helping to find someone.”

#### VI. LOST & FOUND TWIN TOWERS

On September 11, 2001 – fifteen years ago this Sunday – Welles Crowther went to work like every other day to his job as an equities trader in the World Trade Center. After the second tower was hit, the one he was in, Welles led everyone he could find down the steps to safety, and then he went back for more. And after leading more people to safety, he went back again, and again, and again, until the tower collapsed.

On that day, this talented, athletic, good natured, but in so many ways ordinary person did an extraordinary thing, giving his life to make sure others could live. On that day, God used Welles Crowther to find people who were lost.

I know we won’t often find ourselves in those kinds of circumstances, yet God can also use us to find others. Not only can God use us, but God does, and will. At work, at home, at school, through our congregations, in our places of volunteering, God regularly uses us to find others.

#### VII. WHAT MATTERS TO GOD

We hear a lot of talk these days about who “matters.” The current rhetoric is misunderstood, misinterpreted, and drives us further and further apart as human beings and gives us more excuses not to love our neighbor as ourselves, because we get lost in semantics and renamed verbal slurs instead of truly listening and hearing one another as God’s children all.

Jesus tells us in this parable, and the Prodigal Son that follows, that it’s not about “who” matters. It’s not that some are hopelessly lost and outside the flock. But that what matters to God is the finding.

The crazy, completely illogical steps that God the Finder will go to, ad nauseam, to find and restore and return just One. That One matters. Each one. Each color, status, gender, sexuality, race, nationality, origin, religion, denomination, category, herd. What matters to God is each one. The finding.

And isn't that just Ridiculous?!

### VIII. ROUND EM UP—EACH ONE!

Ever lost anything?

A key, a family heirloom, an important paper? A favorite hat? Sunglasses? Or, more seriously, a child?

Ever been lost? Ever found anything, after a very long time, or did *not* find what you were looking for, and are still searching? But, you know deep in your heart it WILL be found and there will be great rejoicing when it is!

No matter how much we might think—at whatever age and stage of life we found ourselves—that we have or *should* have our act together, the world figured out, or know how the “cows eat the cabbage,” at times we will just simply find ourselves feeling lost.

And what better place to come at such time than to the church corral? To church—a place where it's okay to feel lost, feel unsure; to confide our hopes and dreams, fears and dashed hopes to God and share our lostness with one another, confident that God throws one heck of a party and invites all the angels to celebrate when we turn *toward* God, toward one another in community, and find ourselves found again—in the crazy loving arms of the One who will go to *any* length to search us, *no matter what it takes*.

So, round' em up!! Gather up the flock. Herd yourself here and there! Herd your neighbor, your friend, your family—wrangle them if necessary—and come together! Be in the wagon together—maybe try some different seats from time to time—to

find the one that fits you. (I don't just mean in the sanctuary seats!)

You matter. Jesus requests the honor of your presence in his Body, as we gather in worship, break bread, pour wine, sing, play, serve, teach, minister, journey, celebrate and laugh together!

Joseph Holub reminds us that lostness is a part of everyday life. We will find ourselves dealing with some kind of being lost over and over, throughout our lives.

And, “the good news is when we are lost, a passionate, seeking, loving Divine presence and energy pursues us to make us aware of our connection with the Source of life.

We can live with the confidence and assurance that no matter how, where or in what we may get lost, in Jesus we are sought out and reconnected to the love and grace of God.

“I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.” And when we are feeling lost, seeking until we find, walking closer with Thee—even when we're not sure we *want* to be found—let it be, dear Lord, let it be! Amen.