

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"Lost & Found Department"  
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The banes of my existence which never cease to torment me are usually not the huge existential problems of the universe. Perhaps I have been able to turn these over to God in some small degree. It is the everyday things important to everyone else and therefore having to be important to me things, small things that are easy to lose that drive me around the bend when I cannot find them. You know the jokes.

For example, the poor man had the look of insanity on his face when he frantically asked his wife where his glasses had been placed. And just before she could tell him, he began listing off all the places in the house and at work he had searched most of the day. Of course, with the look of superior wisdom on her face, she says did you check your nose.

I am convinced that when we arrive in heaven, for all who know the Lord, there will be no glasses, no wallets, no keys, no cell phones, just ourselves, but not all those annoying little things that can be lost so easily. Perhaps you're not as absent minded as I am, or like my lawyer friend in Quebec would do. He would greet me in my home, then immediately ask me where my fireplace mantel was and would park his glasses there, usually with his keys. Unfortunately we didn't always have a home with a fireplace nor a mantel. This tended to mess up his system of remembering where to put his glasses and keys. Of course, I can't remember where he wound up putting his glasses in those instances because of the passage of time and of many brain cells in me.

I say these things in a partial attempt to be humorous, to tell the truth about myself, and to introduce something of a reflection on God's attitude toward the lost. I like to think of it as God's Lost and Found Department. God, unlike me, is not frustrated and anxious and nearly driven around the bend with what is lost. God is much more like the Father who constantly is searching for his wayward son or daughter, not with great worry and nail biting, but with great love.

I would say God grieves a great deal. He grieves the fact that we humans choose on a daily basis to go another way than his own. And this is not because he simply wants his own way, but knows the way that will give life and blessing so much better than we do.

God heard what Jeremiah said against the people of his time. He agreed that the people in his day, and certainly in ours as well, are foolish, and choosing to excel in doing evil rather than good. Some day, a devastating wind will come through the land and bring judgment. We know historically this was the dreaded sacking of Jerusalem and deportation of its population in 587 BC. But this is also referred to throughout the Bible as the final judgment of all people when we all will stand before the Lord with what we have done with our lives. Such will be a wind that no human being has ever experienced before.

David also sings in Psalm 14 of the reality of human rebellion. Lest any of those listening to his song should think that they are the exception to the rule of human rebellion, he sings to them that everyone has gone astray. No one stands as righteous. He longs to be saved by God, to be found by God, since we are all so lost.

David's poetry addresses the heart of the human condition. Paul tells us of his own life and his own experience of the rebellion within. Yes, even Paul, the one well schooled in the Scriptures, and zealous for his religion, admits he was a person who spoke against God (a blasphemer), someone who hurt others willfully and in a planned way. He admitted to himself, to Timothy, the one he was mentoring, and to everyone who would read the circular letter called First Timothy, including you and me, he admitted he had been a violent man.

Much, if not all, of spiritual truth comes to us as we are honest with ourselves about our sins, our rebellious attitudes toward God, our violence and our inabilities. This does not mean we do not know where we are gifted and talented and good. It does mean we need to know ourselves in a balanced way. We need to know that even those of us who consider ourselves as found of God, saved by God, touched and loved by God, nevertheless still have unsaved parts, lost places in ourselves.

Otherwise, we may develop a strange view of the world that we are good and saved and loved, but no one else is. Or the even stranger view that I

have the right to do what I want, regardless of the context, situation and sensitivity needed to be a good neighbor, like thinking I can burn a book and it is a merely personal and individual right, when reality is more complicated than that.

Jesus told stories about how God feels about the lost. He told them in the context of some religious people getting upset about Jesus spending time with bad individuals, with gang members, and drug addicts and prostitutes. Some of the religious people were scandalized by this. So he told stories about situations that everyone could relate to in that day. Many people knew a lot about shepherding. Everyone knew someone who knew someone who had sheep. The geography of the land there made it dangerous often for those who had a little bit larger flock, say one hundred sheep, to lose one of them during lambing in the spring and then as they came into the hot summer. There were many ditches and cliffs and wild animals and hostile situations which required the shepherd to be quite alert. He needed to count and know the sheep.

And so Jesus told the story of how this good shepherd would leave his flock of 99 and look for the one. And I believe we are meant to think about this story not only for God seeking those bad people out there, but mainly to be thinking about ourselves as the lost lamb, baa-ing, crying out whenever we are lost or confused or hungry or near death. Because God the good shepherd looks for us and finds us when we admit our condition and are open to intervention, both from God and other people.

The other story Jesus told would also have been an everyday household scene which could have happened many times. There was a woman who only had so much money to live on. She had a little bag, leather, with a draw string. She only had ten silver coins to live on for the rest of the month. She had put the bag down and the next time she went to count out her money at the market, she found there were only nine coins, not ten. She might starve or be in serious trouble with someone else if it was not her own money, but given to her as allowance. So even though she had dirt floors, she would sweep them, every inch to find that coin. She would rake through the dust and do everything she could to find it. And as she painstakingly did so, she did find it, and everything was okay. This is a picture of God doing everything He can to help us decide to give our lives and attitudes to him so that we can be changed, so we can choose to decide to be in agreement with

God's ways and will rather than our own rebellious ones. God is sweeping through the dust and dirt of our lives to see if we will trust Him.

He wants us to know what joy there is in heaven when only one of us chooses God's way and says "yes" to what God is doing. These stories do not simply end with livestock recovery or financial gain. They conclude with what? Do you remember how each story concludes?

The first story concludes with the Shepherd placing the lamb over his shoulders in the place of ultimate security and closeness. God wants to show us his security, comfort and peace.

The second story concludes with the woman calling her neighbors over and having a little kitchen party, because she found her lost coin. Sometimes we stress the stress in these stories. We miss the party part. We miss the insight that God loves a party. God loves to celebrate.

We too need to love the lost, the outcast and need to do so because we want to, not because we have to. So let's get more creative in how to be that kind of place and community, not just those we know well, but those who are shabby, needy, and lost, just like us.

Then as God continues to save and find us, we can share that saving and finding ourselves. Salvation is an ongoing process, within ourselves and within our community. Let us continue in both paths.

Let us pray.