

Ordinary C-24  
September 15, 2019

Exodus 32.7-11, 13-14; I Timothy 1.12-17; Luke 15.1-10

At first reading these two parables are about repentance and forgiveness. More broadly, they are about what is lost and then found, or who is lost, and then found. There is a third parable in this chapter (Luke 15) which is the well-known parable of the two children and the forgiving parent. But since we heard that gospel parable during Lent this year, we can focus on the other two parables, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. I'd like to center our reflection on the latter parable, the Lost Coin.

A woman loses one of her coins; in her search for it, she turns her home upside down – sweeps the entire floor, shines a light into every corner. One might tell her, "Don't worry, you have nine more coins left!" Well, that is unacceptable: the lost coin must be found. And when she finds it, celebration ensues. She calls in her friends and neighbors – more specifically, according to the original text and not evident in the English translation, she calls together her *women* friends and her *women* neighbors. This should not be lost on us.

As an aside, let it be noted that Luke seems to have a more expansive appreciation of gender. In the Lucan narrative it is common to find women and men matched together. So, as an aside, what if the shepherd was a she, the homemaker a he, or either of them a they? Perhaps if the gospel were to be written today we'd find more gender variance!

So back to the parable itself: it is about seeking and finding, being lost and being found. Getting lost is built into the human tradition. How often have you left the supermarket, carrying or pushing bags of groceries only to forget where you parked your car? You find yourself roaming the parking lot, pushing the unlock option on your remote, hoping to hear that faint bleep.

Then there's that favorite option when you are creating a document and accidentally delete a sentence. Well, just push "command + Z", "Voila!" It reappears.

I don't think anyone passes through this world without feeling lost at one time or another. Life has a rhythm about it as we pass through loss and gain, achievement and failure, feeling our wounds and embracing our healing,

But let's consider what LOST can really feel like. We don't feel whole; a part of us, a piece of us is AWOL: sometimes we know why: the breakup of a relationship, stress of all varieties, fear and worry (the kinds that eat away at us), the literal loss of a job or the death of one we loved; trauma of all types. At other times we are mystified by our feelings of "lost" and unable to put our finger on its origin.

Sometimes we go a very long time before we realize something is missing, something has been taken from us: for instance, childhood trauma impacts every facet of one's life, causing the survivor to blame the self for what is missing. And so we search, we turn over each rock, we sweep under every chair, we shine light on every dark corner, we rummage thorough our minds for what will open the door to discovery and understanding.

And sometimes, hopefully often, we find that lost coin, the one that restores wholeness and turns us in a new direction and causes us to cherish ourselves more fully and celebrate our life more gratefully. And let us acknowledge that this journey, this seeking, unfolds not on our own terms, but is shaped and ordered by grace itself. I like GPS – it assures me I won't get lost: but I am prone to feeling lost because GPS does not always lead me along the quickest or most direct route. But eventually I arrive.

But we are not just seekers; we are the sought, the pursued. Jesus wants us to know that the woman in the story is God, divine love, extravagant love – pursuing us without ceasing --- we do not just discover God, God discovers us as does the woman in the story who finds her coin, pauses to gaze at, picks up the coin, polishes it on her sleeve, and holds it up to the light, marveling, "How precious, how beautiful!" And then she throws a party.

Such it is as God seeks us. I wish you and pray you that there may be moments such as these for you: moments when you at last discover what was lost or missing --- and moments when divine, all embracing love finds you. You may find yourself echoing the words of St. Paul, reflecting on his conversion from oppressor to apostle: "...the grace of God has been granted me in overflowing measure."

Back to the evangelist for a moment, that we might appreciate the evangelist's personality and theology. These three parables are positioned at a strategic point in the gospel narrative– midway through Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. As you know, once Jesus inaugurated his ministry in Galilee, he sets his sights on the Holy City which would be his destination and his destiny.

These parables may stand as a summary statement of what has happened and what will unfold. A story will address what conversation and dialogue does not. The parable of the lost coin and its sister parables stir our imagination and elicit a YES from us, a heartfelt yes, a soulful yes. YES, this is who Jesus is in his witness and teaching, and YES this is who God is, extravagantly loving and generous, and YES, this is who we are, who we become when the gospel finds a welcome in our lives and we discover our soul.