

Lost → Found → Party

June 21, 2015

Luke 15:1-32

Our journey through Jesus' parables – through his lessons on the realm of God – continues today with what many consider his best known parable: the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Just before that parable, however, are two other parables about lost things. Listen for the wisdom of our Still Speaking God in these three parables: the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Sons.

And . . . be sure to join in with your "line" at the end of each parable.

Parable #1: The Lost Sheep.

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he 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.

Pastor: The sheep was lost.

Liturgist: The sheep has been found.

Congregation: Let's party!

Parable #2: The Lost Coins.

"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."

Pastor: The coin was lost.

Liturgist: The coin has been found.

Congregation: Let's party!

Parable #3: The Lost Sons.

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." '

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has

come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

Pastor: The younger son was lost.

Liturgist: The younger son has been found.

Congregation: Let's party!

May God bless the reading and hearing of these three parables, and let us pray. Always loving God, help us to appreciate your call to party. Take and use my words and the words we will share with one another to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

When I was first starting out in ministry I did my best to avoid preaching on certain types of holidays. I especially tried to avoid preaching on holidays that were not a part of the church/liturgical calendar, but were popular enough that some people expected their celebrations to carry into the worship service.

- There were the patriotic ones: Independence Day, Memorial Day and Veteran's Day.
- And, there were the family ones: Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Now, this year, as your pastor I will be preaching on all five of these special days. Except that today, I don't plan to stand before you in the traditional preacherly role of sage on the stage. Instead, I will opt for something a bit more interactive as a guide on the side.

Before I turn you loose I want to share a bit about these three parables and give you some instructions for your role as my co-preachers.

The first two parables should be heard as a pair.

In one a common shepherd – whom the original hearers would have taken for granted was male – loses a sheep. He forgoes all else – including caring for the other sheep! – and searches till he finds the lost sheep.

In the other a woman of modest means – an economic situation the original hearers would have picked up on – loses a coin. She puts her life on hold – and searches till she finds it.

The man and the woman have the same response to finding what was lost: joy! And it is the kind of joy that cannot be contained. Both characters share their joy with others.

Which brings us to the most familiar of our three parables. The one that most of us grew up calling the Parable of the Prodigal Son. From the perspective of the younger son that is a fitting title and it worked well for us as together we responded to his return home with a hearty “Lets party!”

But, there are three characters in the story. The older brother follows the opposite path. He was found for all of his life until his little brother came home and then he chose to become lost. When the parable ends we are left hanging – unsure if he will persist in his lostness. For him the pattern was different: Found → Party → Lost.

So now you can see how the parable is perhaps better titled the Parable of the Prodigal Sons or the Lost Sons.

But today is Father’s Day so we dare not leave out the remaining character. Viewed from his perspective the parable could well be called The Waiting Father or The Enabling Father or even The Undignified Dad.¹ Just think of how difficult it must have been for him to go from two found sons to one only to have one return and the other to become lost.

¹¹ Alyce McKenzie. “A Prodigal Son, An Undignified Dad.”

<http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Prodigal-Son-Alyce-McKenzie-03-04-2013>

David Lose, a professor of preaching for many years and now a seminary president writes, "Parables don't need to be explained, they need to be experienced so that they might in time be lived."²

With this in mind, I invite you now to each assume the role of one of the three characters. Feel free to be the Father, the younger son, or the older son. Experience the story from that perspective. And, it's okay to change the gender of one or more of the characters to make the story more real to you.

I will give you a few minutes to share your initial thoughts with one another now, then invite you to continue that conversation during coffee hour and into the coming week.

Go ahead, friends, start sharing – start preaching – start experiencing this parable. Or, if you are not quite ready to speak, please join a group and listen actively.

² David Lose. "Preaching the Prodigal." <<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=2462>>