

Lost and Found—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
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This story will make no sense to anyone under 25 years old, so those of you living in that blessed state can take a little break for a minute. For the rest of us, we remember a time in the deep recesses of the 90s when there was no GPS, and a person knew where he or she was going, asked directions, or looked at a map. It was during these dark ages that a friend of mine, Katie, would routinely get lost while driving. Katie would be the first to tell you that she had a terrible sense of direction coupled with wanderlust, and this combination left her on the side of the road somewhat regularly, no cell phone, pouring over the folded map trying to get her bearings. My friend had gotten so lost so often that she developed a ritual. When it was perfectly clear that she was lost; Katie would pull over, reach into her purse and reapply her lipstick. She told me later that there was something both calming and empowering about this cosmetic act that then lent her the strength she needed to get unlost.

I don't typically have lipstick handy, but I do know what it feels like to be lost. And I imagine you do as well. I think being lost comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes. We have people in our congregation who are widows or widowers. We have people caring for aging or dying parents. We have people who have experienced a recent loss. We have parents who have a newly empty nest. We have people starting new schools or have moved to Milwaukee from other cities. We all find ourselves in transition from time to time, and in those transitions, I believe there is often a feeling of being lost. Of being unmoored. It can be scary. It can even feel hopeless. Sometimes, we'd rather not travel at all because the fear of being lost is so great.

I've said this in one way or another many times, but it bears repeating: we use stories to talk about God because we simply don't have the words to describe God with any kind of specificity. What is God's height? What is God's depth? What are the color of God's eyes? Both these questions and their answers are meaningless. They draw us no closer to God.

But by telling a story, by telling a parable, the people of God can come to some kind of interaction with the reality of God. The parable gives us a sliver of information about God that we can understand and that we can share with others.

This morning's parables tell us that we have a God who is actively interested in things that are lost. In one story, the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one who was lost. And in another story, a widow spends time unpacking and cleaning her whole house in the search of the one lost coin.

Both of these stories try to capture the feeling of urgency that God has in seeking out God's people. You can almost feel the danger as the shepherd leaves the safety of the pasture to go deep into the wilderness to find that one sheep who has lost its way. You can feel the frantic

scrambling that the widow does as she lifts furniture and goes through drawers to find that one precious coin that goes away.

That is the kind of God that we worship—the kind who seeks us out even when we’re lost. Even when we find ourselves in these moments of transition in this life that scare us, that seem hopeless. There is no length to which our God would not to find us when we are lost. And I find that to be a comfort, and I hope you do as well.

Here is the catch, though. It is not enough for us to be here at St. Mark’s, delighted in the way that God has sought us, found us, brought us all together—grateful that we are fed at this table and known by God and each other. Particularly on this Rally Sunday, I know that it feels good to sit here, to be a found people.

But the thing is, there are so many people out there who feel broken right now. Who feel lost. And our call, as I understand it, is to those folks. I hate to break it to you, but we’ve already been found. We’re here, together, this morning, celebrating all the wonderful mission and ministry that will kick off today as we enter into this Fall. But I also see empty seats. And I wonder who is out there who hasn’t been found yet? Who is out there who doesn’t know the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin.

Episcopalians, as a rule, are not very good evangelizers. There’s an old joke about a woman who came up to the Rector and said, “I don’t see what the big deal about evangelism is: everyone who ought to BE Episcopalian already IS Episcopalian.” Of all the things we do well, telling other people the stories of our faith is pretty low on the list. But I believe that we are just the kind of people to change all that. I think the good and faithful people of St. Mark’s are just the kind of people who can tell friends and neighbors about this phenomenal parish where we really believe that God seeks everyone; that God welcomes everyone. So, as we enter into this Fall with its new ministries and even some new faces here in this community, think and pray about some ways that you might share the story of this wonderful God, of this wonderful church with friends, family and neighbors out there. Maybe there are some people out there who are feeling a little lost and are just waiting to be found. Amen.