

14 Pentecost Celtic Luke 15:1-10
Christ and Grace September 15, 2019
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There is something sad about the lost and found box. I can remember when my kids were in school and would lose a jacket or sweater or one mitten. I would check the lost and found box just outside the school office. Sometimes I found the lost item and there was much rejoicing. Other times what I was looking for was not there, but I was always amazed at what I did find in the box - things I could not imagine anyone not coming to seek and to claim. In the box there would be a pair of glasses, a set of keys, a watch, a lovely bracelet. Clearly they did not even realize they had lost these items or surely they would have come to find them. Seeing these unclaimed treasures always made me sad for some reason. Maybe because I know what it feels like to be lost.

Despite how we present ourselves to the world, there are times in our lives when we find ourselves in the lost and found box. There are times when we come to understand that inside of us there is a lost child, a lost sheep, that longs to be found and cared for and loved and cherished. Early Church father Augustine wisely observed that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. We have come from God and long to return to God and we get lost over and over on that journey back to our Shepherd because all of us are like sheep who have gone astray. There can be great comfort, and even joy, when we realize that lostness happens to God's people, that it is part and parcel of a life of faith.

What does it mean to be lost? It might mean we lose our sense of belonging, we lose our capacity to trust, we lose our felt experience of God's presence, or we lose our will to persevere. Some of us get lost when our lives don't stay on the path we want them to, or when death comes too soon and too suddenly for someone we love, and we experience a crisis of faith that leaves us reeling. Some of us get lost when our marriages die. Some of us get lost when our children break our hearts. Some of us get lost in anxiety, or lust, or unforgiveness, or hatred, or bitterness.

Jesus was always hanging out with the wrong people, the lost people, at least this was the opinion of all the right people, the ones who were so sure they were not lost. What if we could see ourselves and one another as sheep, all imperfect sheep in need of a shepherd? The shepherd does not distinguish between sheep. Maybe we shouldn't either.

Can we imagine God as a scraggly shepherd climbing over rocks and down into brambles and overgrown ditches to find us? Can we imagine God as an old woman furiously sweeping every square inch and every dark corner of our hearts to find us? Can we imagine God as a mother searching the lost and found box, and then searching out every child and returning to them their lost treasures?

Can we imagine that no matter how lost we are, that God is looking for us and will not stop looking until we are found? And when at last God finds us, God cannot contain the joy that wells up inside. So God invites the whole neighborhood over, shares the good news, throws a party, and the lost and found box will no longer be needed. Amen.