

Sunday September 14, 2025

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 19 – Creation Time 2

Sermon: “Lost”

She was two and a half years old that summer. We were out in the back yard. I think I was cooking something on the BBQ, I can't remember that part of the story. My memory isn't what it was 30+ years ago. I needed something in the kitchen and ran in to get it. By the time I got back out into the yard, there she was, gone! A wave of panic washed over me. I started calling her name and checked the adjoining yards on either side. I checked the park directly behind us. Nothing. The panic was rising quickly. Where was she? Where could she have gone, and in only a minute or two? Surely she could not have gotten far in about a minute and a half. She was only two and a half. I called her mother and we split up. Her mom got in the car and started driving around the neighbourhood. I started out on foot from the back yard.

Last week the scripture reading was ‘give up all your possessions’. And that is not a cost, but rather an invitation to learn to trust fully in God for everything; it is an opportunity to enter into a deeper relationship with God. This week's scripture reading has two lost and found stories. If we had read a little further, we would have discovered a third, the story of the prodigal son.

We all know that there are countless stories in the Bible, but did you know that there are also three macro stories found in the Bible. The story of bondage and liberation – the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt and sought liberation. The story of exile and return – the Israelites were in exile in Babylon and sought return to Jerusalem and the promised land. There is also the story of Adam and Eve who were expelled from the Garden of Eden and, as Joni Mitchell wrote, “we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.”

The story of Adam and Eve also represents the third macro story, the story that has been almost the exclusive focus of both the temple in Jerusalem and the church – the story of sin and salvation.

One of the commentaries I read about these “lost” stories indicated that they were about relationships that had been lost. Okay, if we think about the son, I’m in, but the story of the prodigal son isn’t in this week’s lesson. A relationship with a sheep? Well, I suppose there may be a bond that a shepherd would feel with the animals in his care, but I suspect, in this case, the shepherd’s concern had more to do with losing something valuable... something that he had been entrusted to protect.... and the loss could come out of his wages, or his hide. And a coin? Really? A relationship with a coin? I mean, I know some people worship wealth, but a relationship is a two-way street, and a coin is definitely inanimate. So, what could the loss be about?

What are some of the things that we fear losing?

Both the coin and the sheep were objects that were of value. The sheep could provide wool for clothing, possibly milk for dairy products, and possibly even meat for nourishment. If the sheep was without blemish, it could also be sacrificed at the temple as recompense for sin. The going wage for a day labourer at the time, and many people were day labourers, was just barely enough to feed a family for one day. To be able to save a single coin was a major accomplishment.

So what was lost? A coin? A sheep? Or something more?

What would it mean to us to lose some of those things we fear losing?

So what was lost? A coin? A sheep? Or something more?

Security. Dreams. Future. Salvation. Hope.

In all three cases (bondage and liberation, exile and return, sin and salvation) there is loss and separation. This can cause a crisis of faith. Is God with us

here in bondage, here in exile, here in the depths of our sin and brokenness? It can also cause a sense of alienation and great anxiety. In all three cases what is needed is restoration of the relationship. We need to be freed from what binds us, returned to where we belong, saved from our base selves. These are all about restoring the relationship. These are all about restoring our sense of belonging. If the sheep was offered as a sacrifice, or the coin was offered to the temple treasury, they could be construed as a means to restoring the relationship between God and an individual or family.

Perhaps, if we learned to lean into our trust, our faith in God, in good times and in adversity, we wouldn't fear losing a thing – a sheep, a coin, a because we could trust that God was still with us in bondage, in exile, in our sin, with or without our possessions. Our most valuable possession is not a thing. Our most valuable possession is something that can never be taken from us, and that is our relationship with God. The one thing we definitely do not want to lose is our faith in, our relationship with God.

I had forgotten that there was a second park, attached at the corner with the one behind our home. It was located at the end of the block and not visible from our yard. In it was a little yellow plastic curved slide, three steps high. The perfect attraction for a two and a half year old. And there she was. Three steps up, slide down, run around, three steps up, and down again, over, and over, and over again. She'd heard us calling. She was just ignoring us. We thought she was lost, or worse, that she'd been taken, but she didn't think of herself as lost. She knew exactly where she was. She was found.... found to be having a marvelous time on the slide in the park.