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Lessons in Luke: Lost Things

Luke 15:1-10

Sandy Rothschiller

I am known in my household to ask these three questions, at least once a day, “Has anyone seen my keys? I can’t find them?” “Has anyone seen my glasses? I can’t find them?” “Has anyone seen my phone? I can’t find it.” This begins a search until my keys, my glasses or my phone have been found. It bothers me that I lose things...often. I can be cooking dinner and suddenly I can’t find where I laid the hot pad to take dinner out of the oven. I can just hear myself saying, “I just had it a minute ago, where did it go!” I have been told that if I was more focused and not so scattered in my thoughts I would have a better chance of not losing things! Great advice, but definitely easier said than done!

Is it just me or do you ever lose things? Some of you like me have lost keys, or glasses or something else on a regular basis. It happens. The one positive thing about losing something is the joy you experience finding it! Once I lost a set of keys for 4 months. I lost them in the snow in December and when I found them in April I was so excited, I did a happy dance!

In today’s gospel reading Jesus shares two stories about things that are lost and then found. He emphasized the pure joy of God when what has been lost is found! Our reading is from the Gospel of Luke chapter 15 verses 1-10. I am reading from the Message translation.

By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, “He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.” Their grumbling triggered this story.

“Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call

in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

“Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

At the beginning of this parable Jesus is accused by the Pharisees and scribes of welcoming sinners and eating with them (guilty as charged!). So he tells them two stories that emphasize the joy of God when what was lost (the sinners that we all are) have been found.

In the stories both a shepherd and a woman won’t stop searching until what is lost has been found. Then, on the discovery of what they lost was found, they both call “friends and neighbors” to “celebrate” with them.

The shepherd and the woman in these stories evoke images of God who rejoices when the lost are found. In the text we just read, Jesus is implying that what is lost is us. You and me. When we get lost – and we all do at one time or another – God keeps going after us until we are found! God rejoices! God is for us, not against us. We all get lost on our faith journey at one time or another. When we get lost, it doesn’t mean we are going to hell. Getting lost means that somehow we’ve strayed away from God. It can happen when we get caught up in our own stuff and we forget or even ignore God. No one gets lost on purpose. And often we don’t even realize we are lost until.... we discover that something just isn’t right. The good news is that when we are lost, God continues to seek us out! Our God is not angry with us or hold our behaviors against us, rather God actively seeks restoration. Restoration happens when we experience a shift in our perceptions, a transformation that comes from God.

When we are lost quite often our perspective on things is all consuming. It is hard to focus on anything else. And we are miserable!

I know what it is like firsthand because there have been times in my life when I have been so lost that I just wanted to throw in the towel. I have become

consumed with my own stuff and God seemed not only distant, but unresponsive to my dilemma. In fact, just this summer I was lost. There was a situation in my neighborhood that was threatening to children. So to deal with it I put on my mama bear hat and threw myself into resolving the situation. I became so obsessed with wanting things to be done my way, well actually controlling the situation, that I “lost” myself.

I became angry and bitter. My thoughts were consumed with “the trouble maker.” My thoughts were not only mean and nasty, they were downright cruel. My horrible thoughts actually made me sick to my stomach. I couldn’t seem to get them to go away. So what did I do? I got mad at God. I was so mad at God! I let God know that if God really cared, that God would remedy the situation. When I didn’t get the response I wanted from God, I basically let God know that God was no help at all. Didn’t God care? I thought if God cared, God would make some changes immediately about the trouble maker! I was in a bad place.

I wanted God to change the circumstances. The more I told God what to do, the more things stayed the same, the more frustrated I became. I was right, the troublemaker was wrong. I felt God should be on my side. How could God not get it?

With tears I poured my heart out to my good friend. She listened with compassion and love. She assured me that God had not abandoned me and that God was aware of the situation and was working in it. And God was not only working in the situation but, more importantly, that God was working in my own heart. She assured me that God had not abandoned me, but was working on a transformed heart. That very day I heard a song on the radio that I have never heard before. The chorus went something like this: “Put it in God’s hands.” Over and over I sang it, then I said it, thought it and then began to believe it. Put it in God’s hands!

Over time I began to notice God’s presence more. I became aware that God had been there the whole time, but I was too caught up in my own stuff to see it. Each day that I prayed, each time I spoke my peace to God, God listened. And the more I was in touch with God, the more I began to experience a change within me. Transforming my heart took time. It took devotions, scripture, prayer, friends and even songs for God to change my heart. I was transformed from the misery I was causing myself and others, to being hopeful that God was with me and the situation. That

I could trust that God had this situation and I could let it go.

Maybe you are going through a difficult situation right now, one that you want God to fix, one that YOU want to fix. Jesus tells us that God is working in your life. God is not giving up on you. God is going after you and will not stop! And though you may want God to fix this situation through your lens, God is wanting to do a work in you to transform your heart so that you may experience God’s grace, God’s love and God’s mercy.

And when that happens, there is rejoicing!!! Because what had been lost, has been found!

Jesus tells us these stories in our Bible today to show us that God goes to great lengths to bring us back after we are lost. In fact, God will never stop going after us, no matter how lost we become in our lives. Not even death will separate us from God.

And that’s the point, isn’t it? When Jesus shares this story he is letting us know that God doesn’t want people to remain in their lostness. Jesus tells us that God wants those who have been lost to be found, to be redeemed, to be transformed. Now that is something to celebrate!

I close with a beautiful quote from one of my favorite theologians, Father Richard Rohr:

“God calls us to a new way of living, a new way of relating to God, to others, and to the world. That is transformation and that is worth celebrating!”

How is God working transformation in your situation today?