

Lost and Found

Luke 15:8-15

From the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois
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Matt Matthews

Imagine sorting through a cosmic “Lost and Found.” In the Box are the sorts of things you’d expect to find: coats, wallets, gloves, car keys.

The Box is filled with odd things, too, things like a bowling ball, a tiara, the front wheel of a bicycle, false teeth, a rabbit’s foot, a stuffed rabbit.

Lots of places have Lost and Found Boxes: Schools have them in the front office. Movie theaters have them under the concession stand or in the manager’s booth. Airports have them, as do cruise ships, and amusement parks, and even churches. First Pres has a lost and found Box, though I don’t know where it is.

Lost and Found Boxes contain ear pods, cell phones, notebooks, purses, bookbags, canes, umbrellas, and various other trinkets.

Some things in the Lost and Found Box will never find their owner. Most of the gloves will go unreturned. And some lost things can never be returned. People lose their virginity. They lose their nerve. They remember things they said that they can never take back; so, they look into the Lost and Found Box and see lost chances.

In the Lost and Found Box one discovers unrealized dreams. The young man who can never stand up to his strong-willed father wonders if his courage can be found in the Lost and Found Box. The disappointed romantic is looking for True Love in the Lost and Found Box. The soldier struggling with combat memories wonders if a good night’s sleep can be found in the Lost and Found Box.

A lot of people show up to take a look in this cosmic Lost and Found Box. They lost their childhood friend to cancer. Some people are looking for the Good Old Days. Some have lost their memory; they dig and dig in the Lost and Found Box until they forget what they are looking for and settle for a pair of yellow mittens, or a set of keys to a house they’ve never lived in. Some are looking for a job. Some look for meaning. Some look for somebody who will listen.

Jesus knew that we all know the agony of losing something. That’s why he telling these stories. We can relate. We lose the lid to the carton of milk. We lose a spouse of 50 years. We’ve lost our pets. We’ve lost the ability to get down on our hands and knees to weed the garden, to zip up a grandkid’s coat, to pray. God knows how each loss hurts in its own way.

When Jesus talks about loss in these verses, he talks about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and finally a lost son. In each of these cases the lost thing is found. These are happy stories with happy endings.

But Jesus isn’t talking about sheep or coins. Jesus is talking about *people*. When *people* are lost, this is tough and sad and serious. And when lost people are found, everybody in heaven rejoices.

*“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound/ that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I’m found/ was blind/ but now I see.”*

Do you notice how in each of these three stories the seeker is a god-figure? The **shepherd** is a god-figure; Jesus, in fact, is known as the Good Shepherd. And the Psalmist reminds us that the LORD is my shepherd. The **woman** who cleans her house seeking that lost coin is a god-figure. She's thoughtful. She's persistent. She's thorough. She's not going to give up. And the **father** in the story of the Prodigal Son is a god-figure in that he is gracious, forgiving, and glad when his wayward boy comes home.

These stories remind us of a faithful God who is able always to find and restore lost things and people.

Imagine looking into this big, cosmic Lost and Found Box with me. We're standing shoulder to shoulder, kinda leaning over, looking in. You reach in and pull out a big, unopened bag of M&M's. I reach in and pull out a brand new, colorful scarf. Somebody else pulls out a well-worn stuffed toy.

This is a cosmic Lost and Found Box. You have to use your imagination. It's filled with lost pets, lost souls, people who feel unloved and unlovable. People lost in combat. Children lost to fever. People without an address who are missing a house. People with houses and piles of stuff who are missing a home.

God is looking into this Box with us. God looks and God smiles. God knows where everything and everybody belongs. God knows the child who lost that needed coat. God sees the college kid who is wandering around, flunking out, feeling like she doesn't belong. God knows the name of the refugee who doesn't speak the language and misses war-torn home. God sees the lonely, old man, and knows where and with whom he belongs.

We might not know where these people belong, or who really needs this lost stuff.

But God does.

In Luke's gospel, the shepherd returns the one, lost lamb to the flock. The woman returns the lost coin to the piggy bank. The prodigal father throws a welcome home party for the once-lost, now-found prodigal son.

God has a way of walking with those of us who are lost until we find the place where we belong. God is in the business of finding the lost. God is in the business of restoring all broken things. God does a great job of welcoming everybody home.

Thank God!

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Luke 15:8-15 8 "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? 9 And 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.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."