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Now Am Found
Luke 15:1-10

We all know what it's like to ***lose*** something, or someone, and to ***rejoice*** when you finally find it.

Ever lost something as precious as a ***wedding ring?***

I read this great story about a man named Bill Adams, CEO of a large hospital in Virginia, who received a frantic call from a woman. She said, "My mother came into your hospital with her wedding ring, and now we can't find it," Her mother had died a few days earlier from cancer. Her father and mother had been married for 50 years and, and her dad, with tears in his eyes, had said to her, "It would mean so much for me to be able to slip that ring back on her finger before we bury her." "So," the woman continued, "I was hoping that there was some way you could help me fulfill his dream of putting that ring back on my mother's finger. Is there anyone you can think of who may be able to help us find that ring?"

Bill was deeply moved by the woman's story, he had the staff look high and low for that ring---they looked everywhere the woman had been in the hospital. Until finally he got a crazy idea. the laundry chute. He actually climbed in himself, into the bin amidst the wet, soggy, dirty laundry. To his surprise, he found the ring. He said, "I almost cried right there and then. I will never forget the smile on that woman's or her father's face when I handed them the ring the next day." Ken Tucker, *Are You Satisfied?* (BookSurge, 2008), pp. 55-56;

It's horrible to lose something sentimental....or something you need right away....like your car keys, or your contact lens...

But nothing compares to losing your ***child!***

I remember losing Eli, his letting go of my hand in a crowded mall at Christmas time, with tons of people...and so many sights and sounds.... he wandered off, not even aware that he was lost. Meanwhile my heart had stopped, and I couldn't breathe. I was yelling for Eli, and frantically searching. And those 5 minutes seemed like an eternity

until I spotted his little frame wandering through Penneys without me.....
and then my relief and joy when I could finally breathe again as I scooped him
up in my arms and hugged him so tight while telling him not to ever run away
again.

We **all know** what it's like to lose something or someone valuable to us,
and to rejoice when we find them.

But let's face it---these stories of one lost sheep and one lost coin---
they are **different**. I mean sure, a sheep and a coin are important, but not SO
important that you would stop your life to find them....or throw a party when
you did find them!

These are strange stories that
don't fit with typical life experiences today or back then.

They are **parables**.

Which means we're in for a ride with Jesus,
because the layers of meaning are many and deep.
And we have to realize these stories are told as a response to the criticism
of the goody-too-shoes Scribes and Pharisees,
who cannot believe that Jesus loves sinners.
From his earliest days, Jesus hangs out with the sinners!
So Jesus tells these stories, to say 'you wanna know how much I love sinners?
Listen to this!'

So often we read the Bible as a 'how to' manual.
Or a 'don't do this' list of rules and regulations.
But the Bible, and especially Jesus parables, are story—and not just story of
'how to do it' but stories of **'how God does' it**.

These stories are primarily about **God's character**—not ours.
Jesus makes that pretty clear in his tongue in cheek introduction:
'which of you if having a hundred **sheep** does not leave the ninety-nine to go
after the one until he finds it?' And when he finds it, carries it on his shoulders
home, to rejoice with friends?
What???
No one does this.
This is not the way a shepherd works.
You don't go all out for 1 lost sheep.

And again he tries it with the second story.

'Or what woman having ten silver **coins**, and loses one, does not light a lamp, and sweep the entire house until she finds it, and then throws a party?'

What??

No women standing in that crowd.

Not any of us.

You don't throw a party over one found coin.

These are stories about the **character of God**—not us.

These are the lengths God goes to seek and save the lost.

This is the joy God has when one lost person is found.

The numbers are important---100 and 10 were considered **complete**, whole numbers; to have one missing was to be incomplete.

The sheepfold and coin collection were truly incomplete, and Jesus was trying to make them whole again.

This is how far God goes to make our community complete.

To make us complete.

I think we can safely say that,

at different times in our lives, we are the lost sheep and lost coin.

There are times when we fall away from our faith, away from our community.

There are times when parts of ourselves are lost and incomplete.

And God is the kind of God who will go all out searching for us.

We talk a lot about looking for God, trying to find God,

When the truth is that God is always the one **looking for us**.

Sometimes we are just like the kid in the mall at Christmas,

We've let go of God's hand, and we **don't even know we're lost**,

We're so busy looking around at all the world has to offer,

And all the time God is frantically calling our name;

wanting to bring us home.

Ever been in that place—*lost and you didn't even know it?*

Sometimes we're like that **lost coin**,

not realizing we fell down in between the sofa cushions,

and not able to say or do anything to get ourselves out,

We just wait for this loving God to find us, pick us up, and throw a party.
Ever felt like that?

And sometimes, we are like the ***lost sheep***,
and we wander away, but God still leaves the rest to come after us...
in fact, there's a party in our honor in heaven and on earth
when we are finally carried home on the shoulders of Jesus.

Do you remember being lost....and then found by God?
Are you currently running in the other direction?
Or are you found?
It's a wonderful feeling---to realize you've been found, and carried home.
Home to a community of faith, a family of believers, a place where you are
welcome.

This is the kind of God we have...***a God of amazing GRACE.***
A God who looks for every one of us when we are lost...
And then rejoices when we are found.
A God who says *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents
than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*
(a little irony there, because those 99 don't really exist!)

This is the kind of God we have...a God who wants to ***bring people in***,
To make the community whole, and complete,
Knowing that without the lost ones—we are not whole.
Knowing that we are all really the lost ones,
and we all need to be brought in to be a whole people of God.

Jesus came for the lost, for the ***broken people***, like you and me.
In Luke 5, when asked ***why*** he eats and drinks with sinners,
*He says, those who are well have no need of a physician,
but those who are sick I have come to call to repentance.*
He's come for the broken....now that's ***Good News*** if you ask me.

Just before our story of the lost objects,
He talks about inviting all the lost and broken people to a ***great banquet***,
Instead of inviting our best friends and family!
Jesus comes for those who are broken. Good News indeed.

I want us to emphasize our **mission of GRACE**.
 We say it and print it—*Come experience God's grace*.
 I hope that we will live out this grace,
 I hope we will be even more welcoming to everyone,
 and do an even better job of reaching out to the young families
 that make up so much of Owasso.
 It's an opportunity to brush up on grace.

Jesus' own life and teachings were certainly about God's grace.
 Jesus brought the sinners, the women, the broken and marginalized people
 into the center of his ministry, and he allowed them to do ministry with him.
 And when he told stories like the lost sheep and coin,
 he clearly was talking about **including** people, not excluding them.

We've been talking in Sunday school and Wed night study
 about what great **sorrow** it must cause God
 to see all these denominations and divisions and schisms
 of the church of Jesus Christ, based on who is 'out'.
 Maybe we should spend much more time bringing all people 'in'.

If we were a church that excluded broken people I could not be **your pastor**.
 You have extended to me God's grace in my brokenness,
 you have shown it in word and deed.
 I pray that we would do this for all people, that all would feel welcome,
 especially the broken, the lost.

If we believe in a **God who goes all out** for the 1 lost sheep or 1 missing coin,
 in a God who rushes to kiss and throw a party for the prodigal son,
 Should we not also be instruments of this kind of grace,
 in our own lives, and in the life of our church?

It's a gift of grace to have that opportunity,
 To be able to share God's love in this world,
 To open our arms and lives to all who would come and join us,
 And to serve without prejudice all that need to hear
 the message of Jesus Christ.

May we welcome as Jesus has welcomed us,
 And rejoice as He rejoices when we are found. Amen.