

**LUKE 15:11-32** The lost son

This is a very familiar story, isn't it? The parable of the lost son, or the prodigal son. However, it's not a story that stands alone. Luke 15 actually records three parables that Jesus told which are about things lost and found

The first one is the parable of the lost sheep. The second parable is about the widow who lost a coin.

Then of course we have today's story about the son who threw everything away to go and live the high life. He totally was lost to his family. His father never gave up on him, waiting every day for him to return, and when he did, he forgave everything and celebrated with a huge party.

Now, we could take each of those parables and dissect them into tiny pieces, and find all sorts of deep theological meanings. Many books have been written on the subject. And no doubt they are all good.

However, just as meaningful, is sitting down with these three parables, or even just one of them, and asking the simple question, what is Jesus getting at here? What's his main point? - Remembering that generally speaking, that's what a parable does - it illustrates a single point.

If I had to paraphrase that point, I'd say it's this:

**God cares so deeply about someone who is lost, that he will go to extraordinary lengths to find that person and is ecstatic when that person is found.**

The thing that jumps out at me from these parables, is the love and concern of God for the lost person as an *individual* - a person known, loved, and cherished completely in their own right. We are not faceless people in a crowd, nameless members of the Christian church. Each one of us is a much loved and cherished son or daughter of God.

That bond of love between our heavenly father and each one of us is so strong that if we are lost, we are uppermost in his thoughts. He doesn't rest, he doesn't forget, he does everything possible - to find us and bring us home.

Like the shepherd who will leave the whole flock to search out a single dumb sheep; like the widow who will drop everything and turn her entire house upside down to find that one coin that is so precious - even though she has a bunch of other coins; like that father who misses his son so much, that his

joy at his return overcomes all obstacles, all hurts, all recriminations, as the son is drawn back into the father's embrace.

These stories are powerful - and they speak of a love that touches us at every point in our spiritual journey

**It's speaks of the love of God that sought us out while we were still in the womb - before we were even born into this world!**

*Psalm 139:13 says, For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

Jay and I went out to Richard, Les and Jean Stokes farm on Thursday afternoon. They'd asked us to visit and for me to bless their new place. They've been to church here a few times, so I hope you know who I'm talking about. You can tell they're surfers. Everyone still calls them 'the boys' - even though they're in their 60s - and they get around in a white van with their boards in the back. They've just bought 150 acres of spectacular farmland in Tilba, and feel called by God to open a Christian retreat centre with a few cottages and a chapel, where people can come away and rest and be touched by God.

It's evident that God has called them to a special ministry of being 'finders'. As surfers, they've travelled a lot, following the surf. They see God's hand in every encounter. God brings people across their path who are completely lost, and time and again, these people find their way into God's kingdom and into their heavenly Father's embrace.

Here's one of their stories, recorded in a little book they've written:

"We travelled to this town and stopped at a small church. We walked around the grounds, thinking that it would be nice to go inside and have a look around. Then in the distance, we saw a car travelling up the road towards us.

My mother said, "It must be an appointment from the Lord."

Anyway, the car drove up to the church and he said he was the caretaker. He asked us if we'd like to go into the church and have a look around and we said we would love to. We love going into churches and looking around and sensing the presence of the Lord.

We began talking to the caretaker about the Lord and what the Lord had done in our lives over the years and how we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour...

...The caretaker said he had been going to church for many years but had not accepted Jesus as his personal Saviour. Joyce Meyer once said, "You can sit in a garage, but that doesn't make you a car, which is true. Similarly, you can sit in a church and it will not make you a Christian."

Anyway, he said he would like to make Jesus his Lord and Saviour. He prayed the sinners prayer of salvation. Alleluia! Glory to Jesus Christ who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Amen!

Then the caretaker locked up the church and we said goodbye. He drove back down the road, saved.

**Or found.** Jean was right. It was an appointment arranged by God. This man who had been to church for so many years, was still lost. God brought Les, Richard and their mum to that remote church, on that day, at the very same time he arranged for the caretaker to be there. God went to a fair bit of trouble, didn't he? God arranged the meeting because he loved that man, and knew his servants would respond. He wanted the caretaker found!

**I said earlier that these stories speak of a love that touches us at every point in our spiritual journey.**

It's easy to understand how people outside the Kingdom of God can be lost, but there are times when we can feel just as lost when we're within it. There can be times when we doubt our faith, or times when we cool off in our faith, or times when it simply becomes mundane and stagnant.

I look back over my Christian life, and note that it's a series of mountains and valleys; mostly, I've been full on for the Lord, but there have been times when life has got so busy, that God has been crowded into a corner, and there have been a couple of times when I've been at such a low ebb, I've nearly thrown it all in. Some valleys are deeper than others, and it's in those valleys that we can feel really quite lost.

**What we can lose sight of in those times, is God's perspective.** And that's what these parables remind us of. When we're feeling lost, it's our own discontent, disconnection or pain, that is most obvious to us. We don't think much about God's perspective. It's a bit like when we break a finger.

I was at Bishop in Council yesterday, and one of my colleagues was walking around anxiously shielding one of her hands. She'd broken a little finger and it was strapped to the next one - and very sensitive to being bumped. It was absolutely the centre of her focus! We are like that when we are in a valley, or feeling low or feeling lost. That's often all we see. We can easily lose sight of God's love for us; of how much he longs for us to return to him.

God has done everything in order for us to find him. Jesus gave his life on the cross to deal with our sin, he rose from the dead to give us victory, his spirit lives within us to empower us for God's service. And he pursues us and woos us, till we turn back to him.

We find this beautiful verse in Jeremiah 29:13

“When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the LORD...”

Though these words were written specifically to the Israelites in exile, and go on to talk about restoration, the verse gives us a glimpse of God's desire to be FOUND BY US. Not only does God want to find those who are lost, he wants those who are lost, to FIND HIM. God wants a reunion! God longs for those who are lost, like the son in the parable, to be reunited with him. God is not hiding.

If we are feeling in any way lost, is there are part we can play, or do we just keep doing what we're doing and wait to be rescued?

Listen to Jeremiah 29:13 again: “When you **search** for me, you will find me; if you **seek** me with all your heart, I will let you find me...”  
Search. Seek.

As we get older, sadly, many things that start to deteriorate. One of them is our hearing. Am I right? Have you noticed how much easier it is to hear someone, when they are facing us? If their back is to us and they say something, it's so much harder to catch it.

It can be like that with God. Using that metaphor - If we are not facing him then it is so much harder to hear him.

If we are feeling at all lost - something simple we can do is to seek God. Start praying again, if that's fizzled. Seek Christian company, if that's fallen off. Read encouraging books. Dare I say - read the Bible - if that's not happening. All of these things will help turn our face back towards God - and we will find him.

Perhaps a great verse to commit to memory, is Luke 15:24

*“let us eat and celebrate” said the father “for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”*

Let's pray.