

Luke 15:1-10
Seeking the Least, the Last, the Lost
WRCoB 3.7.21

OK so here's a theological debate.

Do WE come to Christ?

Or does CHRIST come to us?

Yam Sing, on his examination for baptism
Before a Baptist Church in San Francisco
Was asked the question

"How did you find Jesus?"

He replied: *"I didn't find Jesus, Jesus found me."*

The truth is that many of folks
Don't go looking for Jesus.
Jesus goes looking for them.

In other words

As opposed to someone on their own

Coming to an understanding

Of the saving graces of Jesus Christ

Many recognized it was Christ who came to them
And imparted the knowledge of his saving grace.

John Wesley, father of the Methodist church
Called this kind of encounter, prevenient grace.

God takes the initiative, and then gives us the option
Through freewill, to believe and follow . . . or not.

John Calvin, father of the Reformed Church traditions
Had a thing he called Total Depravity

That the lost soul, dead in its sins
Will never find God without God first finding it.

Today's 2 parables confirm the truth
That God searches relentlessly for lost souls
And is filled with joy when he finds them.

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Jesus shared these parables in response
To the Pharisees and scribes' self-righteous attitude
Toward Jesus and the company he kept.

To put it in today's context
This is like church folks criticizing the minister

Who leaves church on a Sunday
And goes down to Old Joe's barroom for lunch.

I mean, who wouldn't complain about such behavior?

This is not becoming of a pastor?

Scripture says as much.

Proverbs 4:14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.

Why, it's contrary to the general wisdom of the day.

George Washington: Associate yourselves with men of good quality, if you esteem your own reputation. For 'tis better to be alone than in bad company.'

And C. C. Colton: No company is preferable to bad, because we are more apt to catch the vices of others more than their virtues, as disease is a lot more contagious than health.

We know this!
Our parents taught us this!

And yet, it is these very people
That Jesus came to save!

Jesus says it's not the healthy that needs a doctor
It's the sick (Mt 9).

Jesus came seeking the least, the last, and the lost.

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And so, in response to the Pharisees' snide remarks
Jesus responds with these parables.

He asks, which one of you having 100 sheep
Finding one missing

Will not leave the 99 sheep out in open country
And go and search the whole countryside
For that one lost sheep?

And when you find that sheep
Which one of you would place that sheep
On your shoulders

And run home and tell all the neighbors about it?

Huh? Which one of you would do that?

Or which one of you women
When you lose a coin

Would not turn upside down all the furniture
And rip up the carpets in search of that quarter?

And when you find it run outside shouting
"Hey everyone, I've found it, I finally found it, praise God!"

Huh? Which one of you would do that?

The answer is that likely none of them or us would do that.

None of us would risk the loss of 99 sheep
Left out in open country, to find one lost sheep.

None of us would tear our houses inside out
In order to find a quarter.

None of us would have feelings of desperation
Searching for something of so little value.

We'd count our losses and move on.

All of us know one lost sheep or one lost coin
Is somewhat valuable . . . but not that valuable . . .
At least not . . . not in our eyes.

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But you see, the parables are not about our reaction
To lost sheep, lost coins, or lost souls.

These parables express God's reaction.

Jesus is the shepherd in search of the one lost sheep
Jesus is the woman in search of the one lost coin
Jesus is the one in pursuit of lost souls.

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There is a poem written by Francis Thompson
Entitled, "The Hound of Heaven."

Not that I like comparing Jesus to a hound
But I do believe there is truth
In that Jesus' pursues us like that.

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him*

C. S. Lewis' own conversion
Came after years of running from Christ until one night.

"You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England"

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Anne Lamott in her book, *Traveling Mercies*

Also writes of Jesus' unrelenting pursuit of her.

She was single, fighting addictions, and a wreck.

Just a week after an abortion

She lay in bed, completely wasted

Feeling absolutely disgusted with herself.

She writes

After awhile, as I lay there, I became aware of someone with me, hunkered down in the corner The feeling was so strong that I actually turned on the light for a moment to make sure no one was there – of course, there wasn't.

But after awhile, in the dark again, I knew beyond any doubt that it was Jesus. I felt him as surely as I feel my dog lying nearby as I write this.

And I was appalled. I thought about my life and my brilliant hilarious progressive friends. I thought about what everyone would think of me if I became a Christian, and it seemed an utterly impossible thing that simply could not be allowed to happen. I turned to the wall and said out loud, "I would rather die."

The experience spooked me badly, but I thought it was just an apparition, born of fear and self-loathing and loss of

blood. But then everywhere I went, I had the feeling that a little cat was following me, wanting me to reach down and pick it up, wanting me to open the door and let it in.

But I knew what would happen: you let a cat in one time, give it a little milk, and then it stays forever. So I tried to keep one step ahead of it, slamming my house door whenever I entered or left.

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Lamott had been stopping by a local church on Sundays
Never fully coming in, always standing at the back
And always leaving before the sermon.

And one week later, when I went back to church, I was so hungover that I couldn't stand up for the songs, and this time I stayed for the sermon, which I thought was so ridiculous, like someone trying to convince me of the existence of extraterrestrials,

but the last song was so deep and raw and pure that I could not escape. It was as if the people were singing in between the notes, weeping and joyful at the same time, and I felt like their voices or something was rocking me in its bosom, holding me like a scared kid, and I opened up to that feeling – and it washed over me.

I began to cry and left before the benediction, and I raced home and felt the little cat running along my heels, and I walked down the dock past dozens of potted flowers, under a sky as blue as one of God's own dreams, and I opened the door to my house, and I stood there a minute, and then I hung my head and said, "[Okay,]. I quit."

I took a long deep breath and said out loud, "All right. You can come in."

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Philip Griffin tells the story of a lost dog poster
He saw nailed to a utility pole.

There was a big cash reward for whoever found the lost dog.

Here is the description of the dog:

He's only got three legs, he's been blind in the left eye, he's missing a right ear, his tail has been broken off, he was neutered accidentally by a fence-ouch-he's almost deaf, and he answers to the name Lucky.

He's Lucky because he has an owner who loves him
And searches for him until he is found.

This is the story
Of God's relentless search for the lost.

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If you think about it, most, if not all
The encounters with God in Scripture
Comes at God's initiative.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden
It was God who, in the coolness of the evening
Came in search of them.

It was God who sought Father Abraham
And told him to pack his bags and head for Canaan land.

God found Moses and spoke from a burning bush.

It was God, the relentless pursuer.

God sought Joseph of Nazareth
And convinced him
Mary' pregnancy was not what it looked like

It was God who found Mary and said
To be of courage even though she, a maiden
Would give birth to the Christ.

It was Jesus who searched for Peter and Andrew
James and John and called them leave their boats

It was Jesus who called out Matthew
From his shady tax collection business
To come and follow him.

It was Jesus who found Saul
Who, in his own description, the worst sinner of all

Who pursued him like a Hound from Heaven
On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus.

It's God's relentless pursuit of sinners
That lost souls everywhere are saved!

This is our God!

A God who searches until he finds.

And He's not stopping until every last one of us is saved!

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Jesus says in the Book of Revelation

Revelation 3:20 NLT "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

I wonder if you have heard his footsteps
In the hallways of your life
Outside your door
Seeking and searching for you?

I wonder if you have heard His voice calling your name?

Jesus will not tire in his relentless pursuit of you.

And will not stop until you open the door and let him in..

And that is my prayer for you.

That if you have not done so already

To allow Jesus, the relentless pursuer

To come into your heart

To receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Invite Him to take control of your life

And transform you into the person

You were meant to be.

Praise be to Jesus, the Hound of Heaven

For His tireless efforts as our Redeemer.

Praise be to God!