

LOST AND FOUND

LUKE 15:1-32



In the long version of today's Gospel, Jesus tells three parables about things lost and found – a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost child.

The reason Jesus tells them is that the professional religious people were aghast that a man who claimed to be speaking in God's name was welcoming all sorts of people without demanding that they first perform the religious rites needed to bring them back into good standing in the community. The parables are Jesus' response to the exclusive nature of the religion of the Pharisees.

Each parable speaks of a God whose love and concern for God's people goes way beyond what we would regard as rational or normal behaviour. Why would a shepherd risk losing ninety-nine sheep to look for a stray that wanders off? Why would a woman spend the entire day turning her house upside down searching for the equivalent of a single penny and then invite her neighbours to celebrate with her over finding it? Her neighbours would think she was mad. Why would a parent throw a party for a renegade son who had treated him so badly and squandered his inheritance? No wonder the elder son is indignant.

And yet, Jesus says that this is what God is like – a God who loves us like mad, who forgives us unconditionally, who includes rather than excludes. And that's the model for how we should behave, also. ■

LEARN

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

God never gives up on us, no matter how often or how badly we let God down.

The extraordinary story of our salvation is that our God is a loving, forgiving God who never stops loving and forgiving us.

God's mercy turns the logic of justice on its head.

DO

Imagine that you are the elder son in the story of the prodigal. Place yourself in his shoes. How do you think you would have reacted to the father's forgiveness of the younger son?

SAY

Thank you, Lord, for always loving and forgiving me. Help me to never stray from you. Amen.

REFLECT

Some time ago, I was in Anfield for a Premier League game. Needless to say, as a devoted Liverpool fan, I had a wonderful time. Great seat, great company, great atmosphere, great result. Only one thing deflected from the experience.

It was a public announcement that was repeated several times: "Would XX please make himself known to a steward or a police officer? XX from XX who has become separated from his dad."

As I watched the match, I thought of the boy – alone, confused, frightened, probably crying. And I thought of his dad – panicking, frantic, berating himself for his negligence in losing his son, his enjoyment of the game also lost.

And then, because the announcement stopped after a while, I imagined the pair reunited – the joy on the little boy's face, the extraordinary relief of his dad, their tender embrace, and how, assuming they were sensible enough to be Liverpool supporters, they could now enjoy the rest of the match in each other's company – safe and secure.

Thankfully, I've never been in a situation like that – so I can't even begin to imagine the panic, the fear, the cold chill that comes over a child when they look around and discover their dad or mum isn't there, or a parent who discovers that their child isn't by their side any more. That he or she is missing. It must be an appalling realisation.

It's something that too many families have experienced – a son or daughter suddenly missing; a loved one vanishing into thin air: the desperate searching, the heartbreaking appeals for information, the never-ending longing for answers.

We remember today all those who are missing, the well-known cases as well as the not so well known, and we ask the Lord to comfort their devastated families who never stop looking for them. ■

PRAY

Pray for all those who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks in America on this day 21 years ago. Ask the Lord to comfort the grieving and for an end to all acts of violence.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you,
that your prophets be found true.
Hear the prayers of your servant,
and of your people Israel.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Look upon us, O God,
Creator and ruler of all things,
and, that we may feel the working of your mercy,
grant that we may serve you with all our heart.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Exodus 32:7-11.13-14

A reading from the book of Exodus.

The Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down now,
because your people whom you brought out of
Egypt have apostasised. They have been quick to
leave the way I marked out for them; they have
made themselves a calf of molten metal and have
worshipped it and offered it sacrifice. 'Here is your
God, Israel,' they have cried, 'who brought you up
from the land of Egypt!' I can see how headstrong
these people are! Leave me, now, my wrath shall
blaze out against them and devour them; of you,
however, I will make a great nation."

But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God.
"Lord," he said, "why should your wrath blaze out
against this people of yours whom you brought
out of the land of Egypt with arm outstretched
and mighty hand? Remember Abraham, Isaac
and Jacob, your servants to whom by your own
self you swore and made this promise: I will make
your offspring as many as the stars of heaven,
and all this land which I promised I will give to
your descendants, and it shall be their heritage for
ever." So the Lord relented and did not bring on
his people the disaster he had threatened.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalms 50

Response:

I will leave this place and go to my father.

1 Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin. (R.)

2 A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit. (R.)

3 O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise.
My sacrifice is a contrite spirit;
a humbled, contrite heart you will not
spurn. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Timothy 1:12-17

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to
Timothy.

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me
strength, and who judged me faithful enough
to call me into his service even though I used to
be a blasphemer and did all I could to injure and
discredit the faith. Mercy, however, was shown
me, because until I became a believer I had been
acting in ignorance; and the grace of our Lord
filled me with faith and with the love that is in
Christ Jesus. Here is a saying that you can rely on
and nobody should doubt: that Christ Jesus came
into the world to save sinners. I myself am the
greatest of them; and if mercy has been shown to
me, it is because Jesus Christ meant to make me
the greatest evidence of his inexhaustible patience
for all the other people who would later have to
trust in him to come to eternal life. To the eternal
King, the undying, invisible and only God, be
honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten
the eyes of our mind,
so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Luke 15:1-32

(For shorter form, read between > <)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

>The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking
the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say,
and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. "This
man" they said "welcomes sinners and eats with
them." So he spoke this parable to them:

"What man among you with a hundred sheep,
losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the
wilderness and go after the missing one till he found
it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take
it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call
together his friends, and neighbours? 'Rejoice with
me,' he would say, 'I have found my sheep that was
lost.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more
rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than
over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of
repentance.

"Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would
not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the
house and search thoroughly till she found it? And
then, when she had found it, call together her friends
and neighbours? 'Rejoice with me,' she would say,
'I have found the drachma I lost.' In the same way, I
tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God
over one repentant sinner." <

He also said, "A man had two sons. The younger
said to his father, 'Father, let me have the share of
the estate that would come to me.' So the father
divided the property between them. A few days later
the younger son got together everything he had and
left for a distant country where he squandered his
money on a life of debauchery.

"When he had spent it all, that country
experienced a severe famine, and now he began
to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of
the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to
feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his
belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one
offered him anything. Then he came to his senses
and said, 'How many of my father's paid servants
have more food than they want, and here am I dying
of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father
and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and
against you; I no longer deserve to be called your

son; treat me as one of your paid servants.' So he
left the place and went back to his father.

"While he was still a long way off, his father saw
him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy,
clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly.
Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against
heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be
called your son.' But the father said to his servants,
'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put
a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the
calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going
to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of
mine was dead and has come back to life; he was
lost and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on
his way back, as he drew near the house, he could
hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants
he asked what it was all about. 'Your brother has
come' replied the servant, 'and your father has
killed the calf we had fattened because he has got
him back safe and sound.' He was angry then and
refused to go in, and his father came out to plead
with him; but he answered his father, 'Look, all
these years I have slaved for you and never once
disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so
much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends.
But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after
swallowing up your property – he and his women –
you kill the calf we had been fattening.'

"The father said, 'My son, you are with me always
and all I have is yours. But it was only right we
should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother
here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and
is found.' "

>The Gospel of the Lord.<

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

(all bow during the next two lines)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and
the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look with favour on our supplications, O Lord,
and in your kindness accept these, your servants'
offerings,
that what each has offered to the honour of your
name
may serve the salvation of all.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

How precious is your mercy, O God!
The children of men seek shelter in the shadow of
your wings.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May the working of this heavenly gift, O Lord, we
pray,
take possession of our minds and bodies,
so that its effects, and not our own desires,
may always prevail in us.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

