

Lost and Found

Jesus often came under attack from people because of his mission.

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

These words were about Jesus,
and that’s what he did.

Not only did Jesus welcome ‘sinners’ —
the wrong sort of people—
but he also pulled up a chair
to be with them.

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

What do those words mean to you?

Disgusting and accusing?

Or inviting and rejoicing?

Two different statements of facts:

pulling up a chair or not.

Pulling up a chair

to be with the wrong sort of people:

Why did Jesus do this?

He was simply reaching out to the lost.

In his stories we hear that a sheep is lost.

A coin is lost.

Jesus came to seek the lost.

Jesus came to rejoice in the finding.

Jesus not only welcomes them
but also pulls up a chair and sits at a table
and eats with them.

He also pulls up a chair for you and me

For he thinks that we are worth it

And he calls us to follow his example...

Today's readings are all about being lost and being found.

What does it mean to be lost?

Who are the lost people? Who are the lost sheep, who are the lost coins?

Immediately we might have images in our heads and Ralph McTell's song informs us who the lost are...

"Have you seen the old man in the closed down market

Picking up the papers with his worn-out shoes

In his eyes you see no pride and hanging loosely at his side

Yesterday's paper, telling yesterday's news

So how can you tell me you're lonely

And say for you that the sun don't shine

Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets of London."

We could easily change the lyrics and say, *the streets of Glasgow*.

And it is probably not too difficult to identify, those who are the lost sheep, lost coins, lost sons?

Could it be the beggar outside Queen Street railway station? Or is it the Romanian lady going round the streets with a tattered paper cup looking for money? Is it the young migrant men and women in George Square, hanging around in the evening, filling time? Is it the queues of people who are waiting in George Square to be served their evening meal from Kindness? Is it the folks who spend their time in the Lodging House Mission?

Lost, lonely, afraid.

Who are the lost sheep? Who are the lost coins? Who are the lost sons?

In Jesus' time, there were many who fitted this category.

Was it the rich young man who wanted to find his way to eternal life, and he had so much money but when he met with Jesus, Jesus asked him to sell everything and follow, he went away sad?

Lost in wealth.

Was it the lepers who were cast away into the mountains and caves, cut off from family and friends?

Lost through ill health.

Was it the tax collectors who were considered to be nothing better than piranha fish?

Lost through greed.

Was it the woman at the well, who no other women would go near because of her loose life style.

Lost through wrong choices?

Jesus was not afraid to identify with the lost, in fact he claims that it is to such that he came.

But if we dig a little bit deeper, we discover that lostness is a universal issue.

In a sense, we all face this issue at some point in our lives.

Here we are, small and fragile in a vast universe. It's not too difficult to feel lost and alone. Go into a city full of strange faces, we can easily feel lost.

The Biblical story is that in a real sense we are all lost, all mankind became estranged from God because of the Fall and we are all trying to find our way home.

Adam and Eve were sent from the garden of Eden, to be restless wanderers upon the face of the earth. It began with their disobedience and so they became lost – lost of the protection and care of God; lost from a garden of plenty to a wilderness of nothing.

If that is true, then, could this parable be a metaphor for this world?

That we are all in a sense a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son.

If this is the case, how can we find our way home?

But Jesus' parables, are not just about being lost, but also of being found.

Parables that speak of the generous love of God. A generous love that was lived out through Jesus. He came to share God's love with this world.

The parable speaks of the risk love takes for each one of us; the 99 left in the field and the shepherd scrambling over rocks and cliff faces, even willing to lay down his life, for the one lost sheep. God is generous in love and he is a risk taker.

He values the one that has gone missing, and in Jesus we see God's whole purpose in coming into this world, it is to reach out with this generous, risk-taking love to every one of us.

The idea of a God who comes searching for us when we are lost is unique to the Jewish and Christian faiths. Many religions speak of a god or gods, an afterlife and religious behaviour, but the idea of salvation by grace, is found only in Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

If there is a creator God and humans who are clearly flawed and lost, then the solution must come from the creator God.

And that is our great hope.

That we have a God who risks everything for this lost world.

This is our great hope, that although we were once lost, we are now found, and in the words of that beautiful hymn that we sang together,

“But what to those who find? Ah this, nor tongue nor pen can show; the love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know.”

We have a God who welcomes back with great joy, he welcomes us into the fold, not with sadness but with joy.

You see, Jesus points out that the shepherd returns home rejoicing with the lamb over his shoulders. The woman who found the lost coin invites her neighbour and throws a party and the son who returns home, finds his father to be extravagant to the extreme.

Being found is a great place to be, and we are all given the opportunity to be found in the love and mercy of God.

The Good Shepherd is calling out to each one of us, each and every day, to come home, to stay close to him, because when we are, then his peace and joy will radiate over our lives.

Why do we come to Church every Sunday? To be reminded that we are safe in God's loving care and to know the fullness of his love.

Amen