

The First Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2010
St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Boerne, Texas
David M. Evans, Interim Pastor

The Parables of the Lost: The Lost Coin

In the 15th chapter of the gospel of Luke Jesus tells three parables about being lost. The parable of the lost sheep which we considered last Sunday. The parable of the lost coin which is today's text. And the parables of the lost sons which we will consider the next two Sundays. Hear the Word of God from the 15th chapter of the gospel of Luke:

Luke 15:1-3, 8-10

Friday night we had one of our periodic family gatherings at our home in Austin. These are among the happiest moments of my life as I sit in our dining room and look around the table at my remarkable family happily chattering away and sharing a special moment. Then sometimes I look at my daughter Whitney and recall how fragile life is and how close I once came to losing her.

The spring after we moved to Austin from Maryland, I took then five year old Matt and then two year old Whitney to a huge festival called *Six Flags Over Zilker*. Thousands of people were crowded into the Park that day, and Matt, Whitney and I were having a wonderful time. Matt was fascinated by dinosaurs at the time, and as I was buying him a small plastic stegasaurus I let go of Whitney's hand just long enough to reach into my back pocket for my billfold and hand the woman the money. When I reached back down for Whitney's hand she was gone.

In only a few seconds my two year old daughter had disappeared. I grabbed Matt by the hand began to search the immediate area. She was nowhere to be seen. I widened the search literally dragging Matt along with me. She was gone. I was feeling sick to my stomach. To this day I can hardly talk about it without the sheer terror of the moment virtually overwhelming me. For several minutes we looked in an ever-widening circle but there were thousands of people milling around and it became evident that it was hopeless. Finally in desperation I found a security officer and explained the situation and gave a brief description of my beautiful blonde headed little girl and then left while he was radioing the report of a lost...or God-forbid, kidnapped...little girl to other security personnel.

In a daze the security officer and I walked down the hill toward the entrance to the park. Then I spotted a woman coming up the hill. She was holding a little girl's hand. It was Whitney. Try to imagine the sheer relief and joy I experienced as I ran and grabbed her and held her close and promised to never let her out of my sight again. The kind woman who brought my daughter back to me said that as she and her family were leaving the park Whitney came scooting past her headed for the gate.

When she realized no one was with her she ran and caught up to her and not knowing what else to do went looking for a police officer. This anonymous woman makes my prayers of thanksgiving often, even over thirty years later.

The single and unique focus of the parable of the lost coin is the feeling of one who has lost something more precious than life itself, and then assumes responsibility for both the losing and the searching. Here we experience the initiative of God. God searches for lost children with the same kind of turmoil, the same kind of intensity, the same sense of urgency, the same sense of desperation, experienced by a father who has lost his precious child in a crowded park.

The factual setting of the parable is very simple. A village woman suffers a major catastrophe. She has lost a drachma...an amount of money equaling one days wage;. The woman was certain that the coin was lost in the house because she seldom went anywhere else. So she searches with the aid of a lamp and a broom in her dark, dimly lit house. Her search becomes more and more intense by the moment.

Can you picture this pathetic scene? The woman moves furniture and turns things over and empties all the drawers and literally upsets the entire house in her single-minded and frantic effort to find the lost coin. Neither in the parable of the lost sheep nor in the parable of the lost sons which follow do we sense the intense and frantic effort on the part of God to recover what is lost. The emphasis here is on the feelings of the one who seeks. The feeling of loss. The intensity of grief over losing something, someone!, more precious than life itself.

We learn early on what it means to possess something of value. One of our earliest words, right after “mama” and “no!” is “mine.” Do you remember the feeling you had when you got your first bike? Or your first car? Do you remember the feeling you had when you spent the first night in your new house?

Can you imagine then that God has that same deep sense of ownership and responsibility for those God created in love? This is good news of the highest sort. For it means that we can never be separated from God. When the woman lost her coin she did not shrug her shoulders and resign herself to never seeing it again. Rather, she searched high and low until she found it. She did so because the feeling of loss was so profound. When Whitney was lost for those long minutes in Zilker Park I experienced a deep sense of dread in the pit of my stomach. It was profound and heavy and urgent. It helps me understand the way God feels about all the lost children in the world.

There are those who are lost in the flotsam and jetsam that eddy in the backwaters of society. Last Tuesday night the Interim Planning Team was meeting and deeply engaged in a conversation about your input from the Cottage meetings the last six weeks. The door near office opened and in walked a man who was completely lost. His mother had died, his car had to be repaired, he spoke almost no English, and he had no money to get back to his home and his job in New Jersey. As I listened his face told the whole story. He was out of hope. His face speaks for far too many in our world.

