

Luke 15:1-3, 11-:32

Samantha sits in the board-room and she is bored. She's enduring one of those meetings... you know, the kind of meeting where you're checking your watch skillfully, inconspicuously begging for the end—yet trying to stay focused. It's Friday afternoon, after all. The weekend's activities fill her mind. Finally, the meeting ends and the boardroom clears out. In fact, the whole office clears out rather quickly. 5 o'clock is quitting time. The day has come to an end and Samantha heads to her car. As she gets out to the parking lot, she reaches for her keys... but they're not in her purse. She checks again. She stops. She pulls everything out of her purse. No keys. She runs back inside, and there are her keys under her desk. What's her reaction to this lost and found situation?

LOST

Jesus presents an issue for us to wrestle with, an issue far greater than any lost set of keys. There were tax collectors and other “sinners” who had come to hear Jesus teach. They even ended up eating dinner with the Lord. But the Pharisees had also come. They came with the teachers of the law, not to listen to Christ, but to mutter: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So Jesus had a message for them, and all the “sinners” were listening too.

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.” One father, two sons: one older and the other younger. The younger brother came to the father and wanted his inheritance. Any good Jew would know that was impossible. You had to wait until your parents had passed away, before you could get your inheritance. But the young son wanted it now. He wanted to pretend that his dad was already dead. The father, in unbelievable kindness, split the inheritance between the two sons. *Both boys received their inheritance. Both got their share of the estate.*

It didn't take long before that younger son took off. He had the choice to stay or to go. He left for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. He was **LOST**, plain and simple. But why did he choose to leave? Was he hoping for a better life somewhere else? Considering the way the father treated everyone in the house, the standard of living was pretty high with the father. Maybe he wanted to see the world? But then why take all the money? We can safely say it wasn't his *plan* to go and blow all his inheritance on prostitutes. It wasn't in his *plan* to watch things get so bad in his life that he ended up feeding pigs—because even the thought of a pig to a Jewish man would be repulsive. Pigs were unclean and despicable. Yet, that's exactly what ended up happening. “There was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.”

For probably the first time in his life, this young man was experiencing what it meant to be in need. In his father's house, he wasn't in need. He lacked no good thing. But out on his own, he wasted everything. He had maxed out his credit cards and blown his entire trust fund. Everything was gone—even his dignity. But why? What had happened to this young man? He had not been kicked out by his father. He had not been assaulted by his brother. So, why was he lost?

This parable of Christ is about more than a lost son—it's about lost sinners. But make no mistake about it, this lost son doesn't necessarily look disgusting. He could be a “refined” lost son. The sinners who run from the Father's house don't need to appear outwardly as robbers, murders, womanizers, cheaters, and other criminals. They can look outwardly respectable, decent and honest. They can be the person staring back at you, when you look in the mirror.

Apart from the Father, there is only one word to describe such sinners: **LOST**. But why? Why on our own would we be lost? Why would we be no different than that younger son?

Sin and Satan tempt us every day to leave our heavenly Father and become **LOST**. We're tempted to run because our sin-nature doesn't want to live in the Father's house. If our sin-nature had it's way, we'd each smack the Father with our own "declaration of independence". As the son left his faithful father and brother and wandered out into the world, so would we. Just like that son we would fill ourselves up with the world of sin, and in the end we'd be left empty. The son had longed to be out of the Father's house. He didn't want the authority of Father looming over him. He deceived himself and pictured his life better off without the parental control.

Things got so bad for the lost son that he wanted to devour the pods the pigs were eating. But no one would give him anything. God had reduced him to nothing. Through this "shock treatment" God was trying to restore the conscience of this lost son. He's trying to remind him of what he had before. God continues to bring you and me face to face with the deception we sell ourselves. Sometimes God does this through self-degrading, shameful experiences. Sometimes he does it through a simple word spoken by a Christian friend. Sometimes God brings us to see how stupid our sin is through the pains of others. He shows us how humiliating and foolish it is to go our own way and to journey away from him. He continues to point out that without him, away from his house, we are **LOST**.

FOUND

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.'" So the lost son came to his senses. He knew he was out of his mind to leave the father. He realized what life was really like under the father's roof. It wasn't a world of oppressive rules and overbearing authority. It was a world of abundance and comfort. What he remembered about the father's house was a magnet, drawing him back.

When he came near the house, his father saw him. The father was filled with compassion and ran for his son. Can you imagine a 60 year old man running to meet his son? And it wasn't the son who had been home all these years—it was the son who had squandered everything. He had polluted and destroyed the family fortune and reputation. And yes, the father ran to meet this son, this sinner. He didn't even let him finish his speech. In quick fashion he sent the servants on a mission of restoration. "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." The marks of sonship were restored. This wanderer was home again—and the father assured him, he had a new status: **FOUND!**

No matter what sins reside in your past, no matter what you've thought or said or done—the Father in heaven will run and welcome you too. He brings us low, so that he may lift us up in his arms. He assures us of forgiveness, full and free for you and me. He forgives and forgets our disobedience and our desire to go off on our own. He put the robe of his forgiveness on you when you Baptized. You have a new status, **FOUND**. To support you and feed you, he fills you up with the forgiveness of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. He gives you that forgiveness in the Body and Blood of Holy Communion. That is a meal with eternal fulfillment! Never will you hunger or thirst when you look to Jesus for satisfaction. Enter the Father's house with thanksgiving. You and I were **LOST**, but now **FOUND**. You and I are in God's lost and found!

LET'S CELEBRATE

But there is still another son. He's the one who has been faithful and stayed in the Father's house. He received the inheritance too, remember? It was divided between them both. Yet he stayed at home faithfully serving the father. He'd been out in the fields working overtime and when he heard about his brother's party, and he's angry. After all, hasn't he been faithful and loyal? And what now? A party for the sinner? The one who destroyed the family name and wasted the inheritance, really? Who among us hasn't know the time when the award, honor, or promotion went *not* to the one who deserved it, but rather to someone who didn't even want it? He's angry!

But if the elder's case is so solid, how does it happen that Jesus leaves him outside the celebration? See what Jesus says: "When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on." The reaction we would expect from a truly faithful and loyal son coming in from the fields, and one who sees, hears, and smells the unexpected at home would be to quicken his pace and go in with excitement. There's a party! **Let's celebrate!** But Jesus has him draw back, summon a servant over to him in order to ask what the father is up to. This is a suspicious son, who in fact doesn't trust the father—and this reaction comes before he hears anything about his brother!

This is a parable, not about one lost son—but about two lost sons. The older son had been in the father's house the whole time, but his heart was far from the father. His self-righteousness showed his true colors. He didn't want to celebrate and rejoice at the homecoming. Disgust was dripping from his mouth, just like those Pharisees: "This son of yours (can't address him as a brother) comes home and you kill the fattened calf!" That's no way to run a household!

The forgiving father shows his patience. He goes out to the angry son. He reaches out in love to his other lost son: "My son, the father said, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Jesus communicates the power of his forgiveness to you and me. He forgives boldly and freely. His love for sinners turns people from the LOST into the FOUND. His message to us tonight is simple: **LOST, FOUND, Let's Celebrate! Amen.**

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