

Trinity 3 (2026)

Some things you can't make up. This really did happen!

Quite a few years ago we had a man who cleaned the church who was a lay Baptist preacher.

Once his young son was with him. While his dad worked downstairs, the son sat on the steps out front of the church.

It was not long before he called down to his dad, saying, **“There is a lady out front who is lost.”**

Taking her to be spiritually lost, Richard (that was his name) grabbed the first Bible he saw and bounded up the steps intent on evangelizing . . . only to find that she had taken a wrong turn and was looking for a certain resort.

He gave her directions, but before letting her go, he couldn't resist asking:

“Ma’am, if you were struck by a semi and killed on your way to the resort, would you go to heaven or to hell?”

I'm not sure what she said, as I was not there, but I was told she began to cry.

You might question the wisdom of his approach, but there was no question about his sincerity. For Richard, bringing the spiritually lost to Jesus was a top priority.

His zeal, I dare say, puts most of us to shame.

In today's Gospel, we have two stories involving 'lostness'.

In the first, it is a sheep that is lost; in the second, a silver coin.

If we had continued reading, we would have found a third, a lost son. We know the story as the “Parable of the Prodigal Son.” It is read on the Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

God is the chief player in all three of these parables.

In the first, He is represented by the loving shepherd who sacrifices sleep and braves danger to search and bring back his lost sheep.

In the second, He is depicted by the woman who puts aside all other activities to find a lost coin. This coin may well have been one of 10 coins linked together by a silver chain found in the headdress worn by married women.

In the third, God is represented by the father who faithfully goes to the gate each morning to look for the return of his lost son.

We are going to look at the first two of these parables this morning. From them we can learn at least three things about God and the lost.

The first is **God claims the lost.**

What do I mean by ‘claims the lost’?

Well, simply this: God does not renounce ownership of those who like the sheep wander away from His care and protection. In their case, they are lost by their own carelessness.

Nor does He relinquish His title on those who like the coin in the second parable that is lost because of someone else’s carelessness

. . . let’s say because a parent fails to teach and train them or perhaps abuses them either physically, mentally or sexually, thus propelling them into a life of misery and vice.

No, they still belong to Him whether they acknowledge that ownership or not, or regardless of what folly they have fallen into.

Canon Frank Colquhoun rightly observes:

“The lost souls of men do not belong to the devil. True the devil has snared them and got them into his possession – for a time. But he has no real right to them. They are God’s by a twofold claim: not only because He made them, but still more because he bought and claimed them [on the cross].

A very wise observation indeed. See a man on death row or one lying alongside a building rolled up in a blanket with used needles beside him . . . see this one and know that his soul still belongs to God and that redemption is possible.

“Every saint has a past; every sinner a future,” as a clergy friend of mine is fond of saying.

So, the first thing we learn about God is: **He claims the lost as His own.**

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” we hear Jesus say in Luke 5:32.

And Paul in Romans 5:8: **“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

But what else might we learn about God from these two parables?

A second is: **God seeks the lost.**

This characteristic would have sounded strange in the ears of many of Jesus’ first hearers, which included the Jewish religious leaders. One commentator writes:

“Many rabbis of that time believed that God received the sinner who came to Him in the right way.”

Notice how diametrically opposed this view is to the one found in the two parables in this morning’s Gospel.

In the first, the shepherd does not wait for his lost sheep to come home on his own or for him to have a change in attitude. Rather, he leaves the 99 and goes looking for him.

In the second, the woman does not wait for her coin to show up. Instead, she sweeps her house and searches for it.

In both, God actively looks for the lost.

What might we take away from this aspect of these parables?

Well, certainly Jesus' way of seeking the lost should be our way.

We dare not wait for people looking for answers to life's ultimate questions to wander through the doors of this church.

No, like the shepherd, like the woman, we must actively look for them and seek to bring them in . . . not perhaps in the aggressive manner of Richard of whom I spoke earlier, but with wisdom and gentleness.

And certainly, our approach should not be one of arrogance, one which says, "We've got our stuff together, let me tell you how to get yours." Rather, it should be the approach of "one beggar offering food to another beggar."

Jesus has left us an example. He went out to where people were hurting. He announced good news to those the Pharisees and scribes viewed as beyond the pale. Let's follow His example.

But there is a third thing we can learn about God from today's passage. So far, we have looked at: God claims the lost and God seeks the lost . . . what else?

How about: **God rejoices over the lost.**

In the first parable, we are told the shepherd lays the lost sheep on his shoulder, and when he arrives home, he throws a party! We read:

“He calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

Something similar happens after the woman finds her lost coin.

All this seems perfectly reasonable to us, but these words would have been shocking to many in Jesus' day.

According to William Barclay, the Scottish Bible commentator of the last century, a popular saying at the time was: **“There will be joy in heaven over one [sinner] who is obliterated before God.”**

There is something we can learn from this dichotomy of viewpoints.

Even in our day, it is easy line up with the scribes and Pharisees and say, **“The sorry old bum got what was coming to him when this or that bad thing happened to him.”**

At the same time, there are people who poo-poo the idea of someone who lived a dissipated life doing an about turn. They may well question his motives.

Another thing that happens today is something is unearthed from the past of a high profiled person, and he or she is ‘cancelled’. Something on this order happened to celebrity

chef Paula Dean in 2013. Jimmy Carter came to her defense. Good for him.

God's people do things differently. They don't cancel; they extend grace. In so doing, they follow God who rejoices over the return of a one lost sinner.

Thinking of Jesus, He did not deny that many who crowded around Him to hear Him teach and to see his miracles were sinners.

What He did do was to affirm they were not beyond the reach of God's mercy and help.

He loved them, desiring their best and not their destruction.

In the end, when they turned to Him for help and healing, He opened His arms of mercy. He rejoiced when they opted for a new life, one centered in Him.

The take-a-way here is: If God rejoices when one lost sinner finds his way to safety, we should too.

It is said that people will know us by our love. It is likewise true that they will know us by our buoyant spirit and rejoicing.

What do people see when they look at you and me? At this parish church?

Let's resolve to be people with bright faces and a community of celebration.

Such an approach almost certainly will attract more than wearing a dour face and beginning each conversation with "Are you bound for heaven or *hell*?"