

Lost Things
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So he told them this parable: ⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

~o~

A police car pulled up in front of grandma Bessie's house, and grandpa got out. The polite policeman explained that the elderly gentleman said that he was lost in the park and couldn't find his way home. “Morris,” said grandma, “You've been going to that park for over 30 years! How come you get lost today?” Leaning in close to grandma, so that the policeman couldn't hear, grandpa whispered, “I wasn't lost. I was just too tired to walk home.”¹

¹ Pastor Tim. “Lost and Found,” Cybersalt.org, February 1, 2020: Accessed from <https://www.cybersalt.org/clean-jokes/lost-and-found>.

Our text from Luke's Gospel has a little something to say to us about the lost and the found. Along with the parable of the Prodigal Son, these parables of a lost lamb and a lost coin point to a central teaching of the Gospel of Luke, that is, Jesus cares about lost things.

“If you're not a former Roman Catholic, you may have never heard this prayer: ‘Tony, Tony, turn around. Something's lost that must be found.’ It's a prayer to St. Anthony of Padua, celebrated by Roman Catholics as the patron saint of lost items. The 13th-century holy man left a wealthy family to become a poor priest. The tradition of invoking St. Anthony's help in finding lost or stolen things traces back to a scene from his own life. As the legend goes, Anthony had a book of psalms that, in his eyes, was priceless. There was no printing press yet. Any book had value. This was his book of psalms, his prayer book. Besides, in the margins he'd written all kinds of notes to use in teaching students in his Franciscan Order. A novice who had already grown tired of living a religious life decided to leave the community. Besides going AWOL, he also took Anthony's Psalter! When he went to his room to pray and found it missing, Anthony prayed it would be found and returned to him.

“After he prayed this prayer, the thieving novice fleeing through the forest, was met by [an apparition]. The apparition told the thief to return the Psalter to Anthony and to return to the Franciscan Order. He did, and was accepted back.

“Soon after Anthony's death, people began praying through him to find or recover lost and stolen articles. *A Prayer to Christ*, written in honor of St. Anthony shortly after his death goes like this:

*The sea obeys and fetters break
And shattered hopes limbs thou dost restore
While treasures lost are found again
When young or old thine aid implore.*

“The popular version of this is ‘Tony, Tony, turn around. Something's lost that must be found.’”²

This morning, I wonder, what have you lost? What have we as a church lost? What has our society lost? So many things that we, like St. Anthony, need help finding, so many coins clinking around on the floor of our lives, our church, our world, so many little lambs who've strayed from the flock...

On the one hand, our text points us to the things that we've literally lost in our lives—not the cell phones, keys, and wallets, but the time, the sacred moments with family and friends, our dreams, our goals, our sense of purpose, our sense of direction, our sense of humor, our passion, our drive, our faith. On the one hand, this text points us to the things that we've literally lost in our lives and says to us—start looking for them again... find them again. It's not too late.

On the other hand, our text points us to the people who literally get lost in the chaos and clamor of the life of our world: those who are poor, or sick, or lonely, or marginalized, or elderly, or a stranger, our spouses or partners, the children. This text points us to the people who literally get lost in the chaos and clamor of the life of the world and says to us, “Start looking for them again...find them again. It's not too late.”

As I said earlier, these parables, along with the parable of the Prodigal Son, point to a central teaching of the Gospel of Luke, that is, Jesus cares about lost things. As the church of Jesus, the body of Christ, the ongoing presence of Jesus in the world, we are called to care about lost things too—lost people, lost hopes and lost dreams and lost moments and lost faith—we are called to care about lost things too. In a sense, we, the church, are called to be heaven's lost and found box. The thing is, though, we're not just a box where things stay lost. We're supposed to be where they get found again. We're supposed to be where people's passions are

² Alyce McKenzie. “Lost and Found: Reflections on Luke 15:1-10,” Patheos.com, September 8, 2013: <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Lost-Found-Alyce-McKenzie-09-09-2013>.

reignited, where dreams are rediscovered, where lost people are reconnected, and where faith is reimagined. This place is where lost things and lost people get found again and every Sunday is a reunion, a cause for joy, a reason to celebrate!

Today is Rally Sunday and Fall Festival. It's the day each fall when we rally together again, renewed for the mission and ministry of New England Church in our community and in our world. What better day to find ourselves? To find one another? To find, once again, that spark at the very core of our being, to fan it into flame, and to live and serve and love like Jesus in the world? This is where lost things and lost people get found again and, rain or shine, that is a reason to celebrate. May it be so. Amen.