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Found in the Father's Future

The first time I visited the college I ended up spending five years of my life connected to, from commuter student to full time on campus student, it was like coming home. I remember my mom saying--- “these are your people.” We were all so much alike. We shared the same interests and passions, and our faith was animated in the same ways. We all read the same theology books and listened to the same preachers-- for fun! It was incredible. I found a community where I belonged. Where I could bring all of who I was. A place where I wasn't weird, I was just me. You could say I felt *found*.

As the years went on, because of different situations and things I was going through, that feeling faded. That sense of being found seemed to slip slowly from my hands. Eventually, the hallways, dorms, and classrooms were all the same but I felt lost. Things were the same but different now.

Sometimes we are lost in places that once seemed as familiar as our own bodies. Some of us have even felt lost in our own homes for one reason or another. Once places of respite now unrecognizable. As we walk the paths of our days we do not set out in a particular direction attempting to get lost, yet lostness tends to find us.

I remember it like it was yesterday. The images are clear. I was in fifth grade. My dad was going to pick us up from school. We had planned to go to see the Cardinals play against the Brewers in a newly built stadium in Milwaukee. Of course the game didn't get played that night. Twenty one years ago this morning we lost so much. We lost so many fellow citizens. Some lost loved ones, fathers, mothers, husbands and wives.

We all experienced loss that day to varying degrees. Even those of us not directly impacted by all that unfolded. Losses that still mark our days some two decades into the future. A loss of the feeling of safety and security. Loss of normal. Ease. The loss of the relative peace of the late 20th century after the cold war. Loss of innocence as we entered what seemed to be our invincible future at the dawn of the new millenia.

Lostness found us as we sat in grief and shock and then continued to be our companion as we stumbled forward facing the ever polarizing fear and scapegoating that now dot our landscape.

Other things leave us lost too. Diagnosis, death, divorce, deferred dreams. Expectations that end up too far out of the reach of our best efforts. Maybe we are in high school trying to imagine a future for ourselves yet what we want is not what others seem to want for us, and we are lost. Or we are retired. And the social circle we once relished is shrinking before our eyes along with our sense of purpose. Meaningful connection seems to be harder and harder to find and hold on to. And we feel lost.

We do not seek it out on purpose, that is for sure, but lostness finds us.

Of course as sinners we get lost in myriad ways. Lostness is ever creative. Our own curved inwardness skews the compass of our hearts and we lose ourselves down roads paved with selfishness and greed, pride and the endless pursuit of possessions. Our sense of direction thrown off and we do not know where we are.

Jesus tells two parables. A lost sheep and a lost coin. As New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine points out, in neither of these examples is it particularly the fault of the lost thing that they end up lost. If anything, the owner of the silver coins should have been more careful and not misplaced it. And, sheep, well do not know any better. Sometimes things end up lost. Sometimes we end up *lost*.

Who are we? Or, where are we? Well, we are lost in a thousand ways, that's for sure.

It turns out, if we are, God must be near. God seems to have some preferential option for lost things. Each of us, a lost sheep or coin. So, each of us, our stories, our pain, and joy, all of it, incalculably valuable to God.

If we are lost then we have met every qualification already for God to work for us and through us.

One episcopal priest says "a lost sheep is as good as dead and a lost coin is a dead asset and neither one would be very good at repenting. These parables of lostness are emphatically not designed to convince us that if we will wind ourselves up to some acceptable level of moral/spiritual improvement, God will then forgive us, rather they are parables about God's determination to move before we do-- in short to make lostness and death the only ticket we need to the supper of the lamb." You are already there.

Jesus himself was lost for three days in death, abandon, heartbroken, forsaken, and forgotten only to rise again. In our baptism we too have been joined to that death and resurrection. It is ours today. There we have been found. Body and soul. Past, present, and future. We have already died

to sin, death, and evil. In those waters we met all the requirements of forgiveness and eternal life by the unilateral action of our crucified and living God.

We still get lost though, east of eden, and our baptismal journey still incomplete. Through it all, though, we can return to the promises of that font. Promises as sure as the one who has made them so. And get acquainted with it. Dip our hands in and remember who we are, where we have been, and where we are headed. Child of God and held in the Fathers hand and headed towards his future. No experience, word, or power can take that away from you. You belong. You are valued. You are precious in God's sight. The gaze of our Abba never leaves us. Our savior and brother walks by our side through every deep and disorienting valley void of signposts. Taking us by the hand. Bearing wounds and all. Until the valley is transformed into the endless expanse of eternal day. We are found in that future. It is ours. You can always come home to that font and those death defying promises---true north.

As the lost and found, dead yet living, baptized and freed, we now live as the body of Christ. We cannot help but seek out lost ones like us. Whether they be refugees or asylum seekers or friends in our pew neighborhood. In finding them we are both less alone. Our vocation is to speak on behalf of those longing to be found. And we listen to them. In the mystery of grace we are found and put back together piece by piece in the stories of those lost/neglected in the world and found in Christ. As grace does, that *happened to me*. When has grace happened to you?

This one welcomes us and eats with us. Week after week. Feeds us with himself. Lost and found-again and again.