

## **“WAITING TO BE FOUND”**

**Luke 15:1-7**

**November 10, 2019**

By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, “He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.” Their grumbling triggered this story.

“Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

*Here ends the Gospel reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.*

“Be all you can be.” (US Army slogan, 1986-2005)

“Pain makes you stronger. Fear makes you braver. Heartbreak makes you wiser.”

“If all you can do is crawl, start crawling.”

The American cultural landscape is full of these false positives, prescriptions to relieve what ails us, this overwhelming feeling we all get at times that we are hopelessly lost.

This feeling that all that is good on earth and in heaven has completely and utterly abandoned you may have visited you your first day in your military service. I have no personal experience with this life-altering event, but on this Veteran’s Day weekend, I can’t help but think about the stories I have heard and read about American soldiers feeling lost on another continent, in a war or in uneasy “peacetime.” I can only imagine what that felt like for some of you.

That feeling that God has taken the last train off the planet may have visited you during one of countless arguments you had with your former spouse. This is the argument when it became inescapably obvious that this marriage of yours was just not salvageable, that this person you thought you knew and once loved could really be this horribly cruel, vicious monster, out for your children, your last dollar, and your very soul.

That feeling that your feet don't even reach the solid ground may have visited you when your beloved died and you were powerless to gain just one more day, one more kiss, one more conversation, nay one more breath. Their breath leaving once and for all threatened to suck your own breath out right with it.

That feeling that God has in disgust left your church may have visited you when you learned that your trusted pastor had committed adultery with a church member and had been dismissed immediately from his post. Suddenly left without a church shepherd, you wondered if you should leave, too, you wondered if it was worth it to live through the pain and anger of the betrayal.

All of these life events may not happen in your life, but we all know the stories as told us by others, and all of us can surely relate. We have all been the one sheep separated from the flock—alone, desperate, frightened, shivering. We have all lost our sense of direction at one time or another. And when hanging off the cliff of life, bleating in terror and holding on by a toenail, no amount of cheerleading from Dale Carnegie or the Sufi poet, Rumi, or even the US Army, can save you.

“I am lost.”

First, there is awareness. My dad, as he slipped into Lewy Body Dementia, got lost often. We didn't know what he had yet; to us, he just exhibited puzzling and concerning behaviors that did not make a whole lot of sense. But the day we knew for sure that something was horribly amiss, he called me in a panic from his car. He was lost. He had no idea what part of town he was in, and he couldn't describe for me any street signs or buildings. He was completely and totally shaken, and frankly, after several unsuccessful minutes of trying to get him to calm down and describe his surroundings to me, I was starting to get a little panicked myself.

Finally, he said something that triggered for me where he was. He was able to read off a building number and it was then that I recognized that he was sitting behind his own office building, a building that he had occupied as a psychotherapist for over a decade.

"Whoa," I thought. "What in the world is happening here?" And just like that, my poor dad and our family were plunged into the nightmare that he would describe as a "fast freight train, carrying him away from the comfort of what he knew into a land of darkness."

"Lord, I am lost."

Following the awareness is the Spirit's reminder that we do not walk in these shadow times alone.

"Lord, I am lost, but you are my Shepherd."

We do not walk alone in these lost times. We have resources. We have Bible verses that come to us like the 23rd Psalm: "Yea, though I walk in the shadow of death, I fear no evil." Isaiah, in the eighth century BCE, hears God whispering to the people, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." Mary, upon

finding out she is to have a holy child, whispering to God's Messenger, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to thy will." And the Lord's Prayer, of course, comes to mind: "...hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; your will be done..."

Yes, we have a Shepherd. God. Jesus. Spirit. A divine mystery, an other-worldly presence that walks the pathways where we have traveled, searching, always searching for us, to bring us home.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in one of the greatest books written for Christians on a journey of discovery, wrote this about getting lost and being aware of our displacement:

I have decided to stop fighting the prospect of getting lost and engage it as a spiritual practice instead. The Bible is a great help to me in this practice, since it reminds me that God does some of God's best work with people who are truly, seriously lost.

This is so true, isn't it? Our greatest life lessons, our greatest awareness of self and our need for God in our life, come to us when all seems hopeless, when we seem hopelessly lost.

"Lord, I am Lost, but you are my Shepherd. I will wait right here..."

We don't wait well. Rumi, the great voice of patience and calm, even gets anxious. Start crawling, he says, crawl away, crawl to, crawl around until you at last can stand up. Normally, I would say that Rumi has it right, but maybe the faithful response to being lost is to stay put and not panic about it.

Joseph's brothers, jealous of his many-colored coat and of the status their youngest sibling was afforded by their father, Jacob, throws him in a well, intending first to kill him, but later deciding to sell him as a slave. Joseph stays put, trusting in the Lord to wait with him. He does not attempt to run, to crawl

out of the well, or to fight. He waits and he watches for how God is going to find him and restore him. And as is repeated throughout Joseph's story, "God was with him."

"Lord, I am lost, but you are my Shepherd. I will wait right here until you find me."

This is the faith statement. The hope is palpable throughout this mantra, but the faith is expressed in the knowledge that no matter how lost we feel, no matter how out of step we are with the rest of the world, no matter how dark comes to claim our light, we can be assured that our Shepherd WILL find us.

I love this mantra. Since I learned it some months ago, it has taken on great significance for me, a person who always think things are mine to fix, wrong paths are mine to correct, lost people are mine to rescue. It has helped me to remember that when the "things" that go wrong are my own, when the "wrong paths" bear the imprint of my own feet, and when the lost people are me, I need to wait on my Shepherd to find me.

I hope you will learn it, too, and use it when you need to. I find it very calming that God-Alive has us on the radar and will not let us perish. We will, at times, all feel lost, but we WILL be found. I just know it. I just believe it. I just need to believe it.

*May It Be So.*

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