

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Imagine a time when you lost something. Maybe it was your car keys, your wallet, or your pay check. Maybe it was a time when you were separated from your parents or your child. No matter what the situation is, when we lose something that is important to us, we tend to search and search until we find it. We frantically go through things in our head trying to remember where we saw the thing that we lost, what we were doing, and who we were with. We continue our search and eventually we find the lost object. And we take a deep breath and are thankful for finding what was lost. We experience joy and contentment once the lost is found.

In the gospel of Luke, there are three parables grouped together that rejoice in finding the lost. We heard two of them today – the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. The other parable which we heard in Lent is the parable of the prodigal son. All three of these parables end in great joy because the lost had been found. In fact, in each case a celebration occurs. The shepherd and the woman call together their friends and neighbors to rejoice in what was found. In the parable of the prodigal son – the younger son returns and the father throws a party.

As I read the gospel for today, I couldn't help but group all three parables together. The common thread of rejoicing in the lost is what I would like to focus on. Before I do that, we need to look at what was lost.

In the first parable, one sheep was lost. The man or the shepherd left the other ninety-nine sheep alone in the wilderness to go and search for the one lost sheep. This one sheep was extremely important for the shepherd to find. The other ninety-nine were safe. Who knows what could be happening to the one that was lost.

In the second parable, a woman lost one silver coin. This silver coin, most likely was one day's wage – to have ten silver coins probably followed after many months of saving. Losing this coin was huge a deal to the woman. She worked hard to save it and now it was gone. We can imagine that she tore her house apart cleaning until she found it.

Finally, in the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son asks the father for his inheritance, which pretty much meant that the son told his father he wished he were dead. The father gives the younger son the inheritance, he goes and spends it, has nothing left, and comes to his senses and decides that he needs to go back home, apologize to his father, and work for him like a servant. That would be a better life than the one he was currently living. So, the younger son returns and his father rejoices and throws a party to celebrate his lost son being found.

The first two parables – the lost sheep and the lost coin end with Jesus saying there will be more joy in one sinner who repents. The author of Luke does a beautiful job setting up for the parable of the prodigal son. The parable of the prodigal son demonstrates one

sinner repenting. The father welcomes the younger son with open arms. Rejoices in the fact that he is alive and well and is standing in front of him.

God does the same for us. Every time that we stray away from him he waits patiently for us to come back and say I'm sorry. God worries about us. He cares about us. He loves us no matter what we do.

When we make mistakes God is there. God is there when we try to fix things ourselves. God is there when we come to the realization that we turned away from him and we need to get our life back on track. Like the shepherd looking for the lost sheep – God seeks after us. Like the woman who searches for the coin – God searches for us and for those who don't know him. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son who keeps watch for his son to return home – God waits for us to repent – to turn to him.

A word about the older son in the last parable. As most of us know, the older son was angry that his father threw a party for his younger brother. After all, he was the one who stayed and worked for his father. The older son didn't understand his father's love. He couldn't get beyond the fact that his younger brother had hurt their father when he asked for his inheritance and that he was loyal to his father and never received anything like this.

It's easy to identify with the older brother. We all want to be treated fairly. The father loved both his sons. The party, the embrace of the younger son didn't change the way the father felt about the older son. For the father it was worse for one of his sons to be lost.

God loves all of his children. We are all sinners and yet God still searches for us. He waits for us to turn back to him.

Instead of the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son – maybe it should be the parable of the found sheep, the found coin, and the father's love. There is much joy in being found.

God rejoices in finding the lost.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.