

“Feeling Found”

1. I wonder if you have had the experience either as a parent or as a child of becoming separated from one another in a crowded place. What ensues is a mad search to seek reunification.
 - a. We had one such experience about ten years ago at Holiday World and Splashin’ Safari down in Santa Claus, Indiana.
 - b. Tracy, our two boys and I went with friends of ours on a warm summer Saturday to this theme park.
 - c. Our friends have four children, ranging in age back then from about 6th grade to 4 years old. Our boys were in 6th and 4th grade at the time.
 - d. When we made it to the very crowded water park, we got all our kids ready, including putting on sunscreen, making sure we knew which ride we’d go to first, and such last-minute preparations when our friend looked up and she asked: where is Toby? Toby is her son, who at the time was four years old.
 - e. A quick look around our immediate location yielded no results. No Toby.
 - i. Right away, we made the rest of the kids sit down in the shade with the very strong admonition: SIT HERE AND DON’T MOVE.
 - ii. Meanwhile Toby’s parents and Tracy and I spread out looking for this blond little kid in a sea of other little kids.
 - iii. We found him. Well, his mom found him.
 - iv. It felt like an eternity, but it was probably 15 minutes.
 - f. As it happened, Toby was having the time of his life.
 - i. When his mom found him, he was lining up for the third time on the short line for a particular water ride
 - ii. Toby looked up and saw his mom, and the first thing he wanted to do is tell her about how he had ridden this ride several times already!
 - iii. He was soaking wet, already a pink nose, and a smile from ear to ear.
 - iv. Toby wasn’t lost. He didn’t FEEL lost.
 - v. He never felt nervous.
 - vi. He was just doing his Toby thing, a confident 4-year-old in a crowded theme park, blending in and having a ball!
 - g. Now, I’ve seen parents react in such an encounter.
 - i. I’ve seen parents cry with relief at finding the child.
 - ii. I’ve seen parents spank the “lost” kid for getting lost.
 - iii. I’ve also seen them embrace the kid and not let go.
 - iv. All of which, by the way, is terribly confusing to the “lost” kid.
 1. The kid wasn’t feeling lost, so there is no way they could feel found.

- v. I've yet to see a parent swoop the "lost" kid in their arms in celebration and then sitting with them to hear all their adventures apart from their family.
 - h. Incidentally, you can probably guess that having kids get loose from their parents is a daily if not hourly occurrence at a theme park.
 - i. So, here's the thing: the theme park knows these separations happen and they're ready to assist to reunite parent and child.
 - ii. But they don't talk about helping or finding "lost children" but instead they refer to "lost parents"
 - iii. There are tents at Holiday World and Splashin' Safari that are clearly marked "Lost Parents" (and truth be told, the anxious parents waiting in the tent do look a bit lost and bewildered)
- 2. Our passages today revolve about being lost and found, and letting little Toby teach us through his eyes, we can ponder how our passages speak also to feeling lost and feeling found.
 - a. Perhaps you are already familiar with the two parables Jesus shared, the one about the lost sheep and the one about the lost coin, that's how we refer to them.
 - i. In the Gospels, over and over again, Jesus is making the case for reunification
 - ii. In the wide angle, Jesus is talking about reunifying us humans with God, because we've become separated or worse, estranged.
 - 1. Here is when we talk about humanity's tendencies towards sinfulness, rebellion, or at the very least, to an immature idea of independence
 - 2. Here is when stories like Jeremiah's passage for today make sense
 - 3. That prophesy is about how God is very unhappy with the direction that the people of God have chosen to go (against God)
 - 4. Very strong language is here to try to make the case that the people of God needed to turn back to God, back to faithfulness
 - iii. In the zoomed in angle, Jesus is pointing out that there are people on the margins of society who need to be brought from the edges to the center
 - 1. Here is when Jesus goes to the outskirts of town and heals lepers, or where he chooses to skip the invitation at fancy homes in favor of invitations at simple homes
 - 2. Here is when Jesus gets criticized by those in power because Jesus is spending too much time (or any time at all) with people who are considered to be undesirable, unclean or plainly sinful
 - 3. But Jesus is saying: no! These are people we want to bring back into the fold! God wants them back!
 - 4. Here is when Paul's passage in Timothy makes sense
 - a. I'm a sinner (the worst!) and yet Jesus called me to serve
 - b. So if I can make it back, anyone else can!
 - iv. The two parables are meant to put in stark terms how we human think and how God thinks

1. Human thinking might be: the 99 sheep are still in the pen, or the 9 coins are still in the purse.
 - a. What's the problem?
 - b. Don't bother me about these "lost" people. That's their own fault they're lost
 2. But Jesus says: nice try! But I know you all.
 - a. I know that if you had 99 sheep and one got lost, you'd make every effort to track that one down
 - b. You wouldn't think twice about leaving the 99 behind, even if it might make them feel overlooked or vulnerable!
 - c. For sure if you lost one coin, you'd turn the house upside down to find it.
 - d. That coin is valuable (it's not a penny but a lot of money!) and so you won't stop until you find it.
 3. Think of when we lost Toby at the park, our friends didn't look around and say: well, you know, we still have three other kids...
3. Like the "lost parents" tent at the water park, maybe we could think of "lost community" or "lost church" to see these parables in a new light.
- a. By emphasizing the "lost" we are centering the experience of the "not lost"
 - i. That is: we define that single sheep or single coin not on their own terms, but in the terms of the majority culture.
 - ii. For all we know that sheep or that coin doesn't feel lost, so how can we convince them they've now been found? Toby didn't think he was lost.
 - b. Jesus is clever with these stories.
 - i. He is talking about "the lost" and the crowd thinks that's not us. But it is!
 - ii. God wanted them as much as anyone else back in the fold.
 - iii. But if they don't feel lost, how can they feel found?
 - c. I think if we define our location not as lost or found, but as dislocated, as disconnected, then we might glimpse good news with reunification
 - i. Don't tell me you have not done a happy dance when you are folding clean laundry and "discover" a \$20 bill in the pockets of your own pants!
 - d. Our efforts as a congregation to focus on people living on the margins, as Jesus did, isn't to say that we're at the center of the world and we're going to bring those poor lost souls into the light of God.
 - i. No! God is reconnecting us with people we've been disconnected from (due to societal or historical pressures) by relocating ourselves to the margins, to what can become a transformed center
 - ii. It's not enough to say that we should be working to create affordable housing in Columbus: but each neighborhood needs to have a full range of all housing
 - iii. It's not enough to say that we should fight racism, but guests at dinner tables should be the full range of the community, whether it's our table or we're the guests

- iv. It is not until we see that you and I are a part of that flock of sheep tended by the Good Shepherd that we recognize how hard the Good Shepherd is working to keep us in the fold, to keep us from wandering away, to keep us together.
 1. We take it for granted.
 2. And ourselves not feeling found makes us not feel too bad for those who've wandered (or have been shooed) away.
4. We may not feel lost. We may not feel found. But in the ongoing saga of the relationship between God and humans, we have been both lost and found. Maybe reflecting on that will open us up to how we work towards reconnection, reunification. And maybe we will feel grateful and feel found.

Reflection Questions

1. Share a story of when you have felt lost or have felt found.
2. The parables in Luke 15:1-10 are told from the perspective of the shepherd/woman. What insights would we get with a retelling of the same parable from the perspective of the 99 sheep / 9 coins or the 1 sheep / 1 coin?
3. What would be a concrete call to action from these parables for followers of Jesus in our community today?