

Dear friends,

Today we read two parables – the lost sheep and the lost coin – and these are a reminder to us that God never stops searching for those who are lost. These stories were told to religious people to challenge them about who they discounted – and should make us ensure that we don't become complacent and so forget the call to love all people. I hold you all in my thoughts and prayers and wish you every blessing. Margaret.

Call to worship:

God, we your people love you. We are here now to praise you, to read your word & to learn from you. We are different from each other – young and old, quiet and loud, serious or frivolous, tired or lively. Help us all to worship you with one heart and mind. Amen.

We come as many and as one to worship God the One-in-Three – to be encouraged and inspired – to praise the one who gives us hope.

Lord, your very being calls us here – we long for your love – we ask for your leading.

May we lift our lives to you today. Amen.

The words to 'How deep the Father's love for us' written by Stuart Townend. Copyright 1995

Thankyou Music.

Songs of Fellowship 780

1 How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That he should give his only Son
To make a wretch his treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
Thee Father turns his face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

2 Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon his shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

3 I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from his reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.

Prayer:

Lord, who calls the lost to be found and who seeks to know us and be known, we worship you. We praise you for your constancy, your faithfulness, your unending love, and your undiminished passion for the wellbeing of your people. Amen.

O God, where we have closed doors where we should have opened them – forgive us.
When we have stayed in the box where we were called to break out – forgive us.
When we have bubbled ourselves so thoroughly that we cannot even perceive what is outside our experience – forgive us.
When we have been gatekeepers rather than welcomers – forgive us.
May we ditch judgmentalism – throw away condemnation – and may we learn how to celebrate the loving invitation of your kingdom. Amen.

Ever-loving God – you call us all into your family of grace.
Where we have been lost, you seek us.
You retrieve us, you untangle us from the thorns that ensnare us.
Your hands are kind; you restore us with joy.
Thank you for not only accepting us but celebrating us, delighting in us as we discover what it means to belong to you. Amen.

God of the wayward and the weary, we praise you.
We thank you for caring about each one of us – that we have worth, that we are valued.
We praise you for your persistent love. May we, too, love persistently and offer the welcome that you give, modelling our lives on the greatest rescuer of all. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15: 1-10. [Scripture quotation taken from THE MESSAGE. Copyright by Eugene Peterson 1993,1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001,2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group]

By this time, a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging round Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religious 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 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 neighbours, 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.

Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and has lost one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny till she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbours: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it – that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

Comment:

Whom do you identify with in these parables? Could we identify with the lost sheep and the lost coin – after all, we never seem to get it right, always miss the mark, feel as though we are hidden in a dark corner or alone in a scary wilderness – feeling vulnerable and useless.

We know that God loves us – after all God loves everyone. But often, when we look at everyone else, it is easy to feel that God probably loves them a lot more.

Jesus' parables tell a different story – God loves us so much that he never stops looking. When we realise that truth, there will be great rejoicing in heaven.

Despite Jesus' stern words about discipleship people were still flocking to him. In terms of their stake in society, the tax collectors and other sinners were the 'poor' – those who had always been the focus of Jesus' ministry. But to the Pharisees these people were sinners whose lifestyles put them outside the people of God.

Jesus told them these two parables and drew the same point from them both: that there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. The reference to the 99 righteous is, of course, ironic: Jesus surely intends his audience [in particular, the Pharisees] to repent!

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A Letter from God.

When you awoke, I was there, waiting upon you. I wanted to share in your love.

At breakfast you listened to the radio and rushed your breakfast. You had no time to speak to me. I waited but you did not turn to me.

Though you travelled by rail you spent your time on your laptop and reading the news. You did not once give me a thought. And I waited for you to turn to me.

During your work there were lots of small gaps. There was more time at lunch. But you did other things and had no time for me. Yet I waited for you to turn to me.

At the end of the day you watched television and played a game. For a while you dozed before you had your last drink of the day. And I waited for you to turn to me.

Now, I thought, you will have time – just before you go to sleep. Instead, you read until you were tired. You worried about tomorrow and at last fell asleep.

I will surround you with my love this night.

I will wait for you tomorrow – and if you do not remember I will be there the day after.

I will wait until you turn to me.

All my love, God.

Prayer:

We pray for those whose friends or family members have gone missing – thinking of those still searching, and for those who have lost hope.

We pray for those who have lost their health – for those still embracing life with courage and for those who have lost hope of an end to their pain.

We pray for those who feel that God has gone missing – for those still searching for a sense of his presence, and for those who have given up.

We pray for those who go in search of the lost, the lonely and the abandoned – and who rejoice at every life that is transformed, every heart that is warmed and every hand that is held.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

God of the lost and the found – when I lose heart, help me to find hope.

When I lose strength, help me to find courage.

When I lose security, help me to find trust.

When I lose patience, help me to find grace.

When I lose faith, help me to find you afresh and to rejoice. Amen.

The words to ‘There is a Redeemer’ written by Melody Green [vs 1&2] [b.1946] & Keith Green [v 3] [1953-1982] Singing the Faith 338

1 There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God’s own Son,

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done.*

2 Jesus my Redeemer, name above all names,

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, O for sinners slain. *Refrain*.....

3 When I stand in glory I will see his face,

And there I’ll serve my King for ever in that holy place. *Refrain*.....

Close:

God of the lost, open our eyes to see the world as you do.

Forgive us when we fail to see the lost.

Help us to look for those who need your love, and give us the courage not only to offer them signs of your love but, by our actions and words, to share your love with them. Amen.

Generous God, thank you for your patience when we are slow to understand.

Thank you for your forgiveness when we make a mistake.

Thank you for the strength to carry on when we are exhausted.

Thank you for the joy of loving and being loved by you. Amen.

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