



## On Being Lost and Found

*TEXT*  
*Luke 15:1–10*

February 23, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

**L**uke 15:1–10: *Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup>And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup>Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. <sup>8</sup>“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

From my earliest days as a child, I remember camping. Both my father and mother loved camping. Of course, we were in Hawaii, and it was easy to go to a beach somewhere and pitch our tent. It was warm, and we would swim all day, then eat whatever Mom cooked on our hibachi charcoal grill, and fall asleep under the stars. So, when we moved to Seattle when I was 11, it was no surprise that our first summer, Dad and Mom took us camping. We went to Mt. Rainier National Park. And while it was nothing like the beaches in Hawaii, it was a different kind of beautiful. We were in the deep forest with Douglas firs all around us. We went hiking each day on real mountains. We loved it: three boys, Mom and Dad.

We were nearing the end of the week of camping and after supper, Dad announced to us that we were going for a night hike. This was a novelty for us, and we were excited. He told us that it would just be the “men” for this night hike. We asked about Mom, and Dad assured us that Mom would be fine without us for a few hours. When we asked if she would be lonely without us, Dad told us he was sure Mom would be fine. We are not the brightest of God’s children, and

it did not occur to us that after almost a week together, Mom needed some time away from us.

Then Dad told us not to bother with our individual flashlights. He said he would bring his one big flashlight, the kind with the single square 6-volt battery. Again, we are not the brightest of God’s children, and so we left our own flashlights behind, trusting our Presbyterian pastor father. It was cloudy that night, so there was no moonlight, no starlight. Again, as we were getting ready to leave, we would ask, “But isn’t Mom going to miss us?” Again, see, we were not the brightest of God’s children.

Dad insisted, “Mom will be fine. In fact, she wants us to take a long hike.” So we would leave Mom reading by the Coleman lantern, the kind with the mantles that burned but didn’t burn, reading her *Reader’s Digest* condensed book by herself.

We would be walking, and after a while, we would take enough turns that we could no longer see mom. It was then that Dad told us about a one-eyed grizzly bear named Shakar that liked to roam around Mt. Rainier National Park — especially on these cloudy nights. My older brother Jason asked how it was that Shakar came to only have

one eye, and Dad said that years ago, a Japanese American little boy had thrown a rock at him and taken out his eye. Ever since then, Shakar had a special hatred and hunger for Japanese American little boys. Dad said Shakar could smell Japanese American little boys from miles away. He especially liked to eat Japanese American little boys because we ate so much fish. We were like surf and turf in one bite — flesh and seafood all at once.

Then, while we were hiking, our Presbyterian pastor father, who has taken vows before God and others to love God with all her heart and soul and mind and strength and to love others as he wants to be loved, Dad would take out of his pocket a good-sized rock, and when we were not looking, he would throw it in some nearby bushes. And we would say, “What was that?”

Dad would say, “I don’t know. But it sounded big.” Then, while we were getting worried, our father, from whom we are his offspring, this Presbyterian pastor who has taken vows to be honest and truthful and to love God and to love others as he wants to be loved, would turn off his flashlight so it was pitch black. I am talking about the kind of pitch darkness that you could hold up your hand in front of your face and not see. And Dad would say, “Well, boys, that is the oddest thing. I just put a new battery in this.”

And we would be searching for him, and then our father, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, there in the darkness, right in the midst of us, would

stop talking. We would be like “Dad? Dad?” And he would not answer. “Where’s Dad?”

And then Garfield, the youngest at the time, who has always had an Eeyore-like personality, would say, “He’s been eaten. Shakar must have gotten to him. We are now half orphans. Perhaps he has eaten Mom, too. She was, after all, unprotected.” Well now Jason is trying to reach Gar to get him to stop talking, and I am crying. I remember our grabbing on to each other and running in the complete darkness through trees and hitting branches and tripping over rocks and logs and falling and then, in a miraculous moment, seeing Mom sitting at the table reading her book by the Coleman lantern.

We would run out of the dark, and we would climb all over Mom, terrified, and we would all be talking at once. “Mom, we were lost!” “We don’t know what happened to Dad!” “He’s been eaten. You are now a widow.”

All the while Mom is asking, “Boys, where is your father?”

And breathless, we would tell her, “We don’t know! His flashlight broke and then ...” And just at that moment, a miracle! Dad would come out of the woods, and his flashlight would be working again, and we would run to him and climb on him and say, “Dad! You’re alive! We’re so glad!” I told you we were not the brightest of God’s children.

Usually that episode would end with something like Mom telling us we were fine and then looking at Dad and saying “Dick, we need to talk in the car.” And Dad saying, “Alice, I don’t know

what happened. The boys just ran off without me.”

There is something about being lost and then being found. When the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees and the scribes, really lawyers, were grumbling about how Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them, Jesus tells them a parable, a story with a purpose, about a shepherd who discovers he has lost one sheep, and leaving the other 99 behind in the wilderness, he goes and searches for that one. And when he finds the lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulders and carries it home and rejoices, and calls his friends and neighbors together to celebrate.

Then he tells a parable about a woman who has ten silver coins. Actually it says ten drachmas, which is worth about a day’s wage for a laborer — not a huge sum, but not insignificant. Still, when she discovers she has lost one coin, she lights a lamp and sweeps the house, turns the house upside down in the middle of the night. And when she finds the lost coin, just like the shepherd, she calls her friends and neighbors and throws a party, likely spending more than the value of the lost coin to celebrate.

By our standards today, neither parable makes much sense. For most businesses, a one percent loss is nothing. You have 100 sheep and discover one is missing, fine — even losing a day’s wage, ten percent of your wages. It hurts, but to spend all night looking for it, and then when you find it, spending it on a party?!

The shepherd? The woman? Jesus is teaching us about the nature of God. God is the shepherd. God is the woman. God loves you so much that when you are lost, God is going to risk everything to find you. God is going to turn over the whole house to find you. And when God does, God is going to throw a party. That is the nature of God.

When I was teaching at Columbia Seminary, I received an urgent voicemail message from one of my former students, Anna, who was serving as an associate pastor in Pensacola, Florida. I called her back, and she told me that she needed help. One of her youth group members, a wonderful young woman, a high school senior, and elder on their session, who had just received a full scholarship to Florida State University, had fallen in love with a 27-year-old young man, a sailor who was stationed at the naval air station. He was being transferred to San Diego, and she had just told Anna and her own parents that she was going with him. The young woman's parents were dismayed.

Anna could not believe it. She said, "Rodger, we have to stop her. She is going to throw her whole life away." I agreed that the young woman was making a potentially horrible, life-changing decision, but then Anna caught me off guard. She said, "Don't you see? If she goes with this guy, she will be lost forever."

"What did you say, Anna?" I asked.

Anna repeated, "I said if she goes with this guy to San Diego, she will be lost forever!"

"I'm sorry, Anna, but that is not possible," I said to her.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Anna, you told me she is serving as an elder."

"Yes," Anna replied. "We ordained her last spring."

"So she has she been baptized?" I asked.

"Of course," Anna said.

"And has she been confirmed?" I asked.

"Well, yes," Anna replied.

"Anna," I said, "she is a child of God. How dare you say she will be lost forever? No child of God can be lost forever. God is so much more faithful than that!"

Jesus teaches us. God is the shepherd who leaves the others behind to search for the one. God is the woman who turns the house upside down and spends the whole night searching for the one. God does this because the one ... the one might be you ... or your sister or brother or daughter or son or mother or father or granddaughter or your grandson or your best friend.

This is a God who will never let you be lost. This is a God who will tenaciously search for you and find you and bring you home.

No diagnosis, no disease, no disappointment, no disability, no decision, no difficulty, no depression, no addiction, no disaster, not even death can make you so lost that the God of the universe in Jesus Christ will not tenaciously search for you and find you and bring you home.

Trust this. Believe this. You will be found.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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This sermon included a performance of the song *You Will Be Found*, from the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* by Steven Levenson.

**This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.**

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.