

## Lost and Found

### Year C, Proper 19 – Luke 15:1-10

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, September 11, 2016*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Many of you already know that Jenny and I were fellow choir members and friends for nearly three years before we started dating. Because we were friends for so long, once we *did* start dating, we were engaged within weeks and married within six months. But that does not mean that everything went without incident in the meantime. One such *incident* has been much on my mind this week.

Not long at all into our courtship, before we were engaged, I think, though I remain subject to gentle correction, Jenny and I had planned a date that went horribly awry. In those days, we both lived in Clarksville, but Jenny commuted to work at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville, an hour or so away, depending on the traffic. On the day in question, a group of medical support folks from Ft. Campbell had a meeting of some sort on the campus of Vanderbilt University, and a bus had been arranged for our transportation. At that point in our relationship, Jenny and I were always trying to find even a few extra minutes to spend together, so we put together a plan for me to decline the return bus trip, and for her to pick me up at the Vandy student union, so that we could have a nice dinner together in “the big city,” and then ride home together.

Simple plan, right? Oh, not so much.

My meeting had ended early enough in the afternoon for our group to get back to post only *shortly* after normal close of business, so I fully expected to wait a bit until Jenny could get away from work. Having bragged a little bit to my colleagues about my plans for the evening, I bid them a safe trip as the bus headed home, and I walked the block or two to the student union, where I sat down with a magazine I had brought specifically for the purpose, and began waiting for my newly beloved.

Meanwhile, Jenny found her way through rush hour traffic to the Vanderbilt campus and the student union and began waiting for *her* newly beloved. She waited. And she waited. And she waited. Today, I would have gotten a text early in this process, and all would have been resolved. But in the spring of 1983, the cell phone was still firmly in the future, at least for folks like us, so my beautiful someday-bride-to-be was left there at the student union, wondering what had happened to me. The expected minutes turned into a half-hour, which turned into an hour, which turned, minute by advancing minute, into the thought, and then the concern, and then the *certainty* that something had gone very wrong with our plans. Assured by the student attendant at the union that there was absolutely no ambiguity possible in our choice of meeting place, Jenny got back into her little white Sentra, and made her tearful way up I-24.

An hour later, she let herself into my house and, getting no reply from her frantic “hellos,” she ran from room to room looking for some sign of what had become of me. Afraid that she had somehow left her beloved stranded, she clutched one of my worn T-shirts to her tear-streaming face, and sat in one of the two chairs I owned to call the few places she thought I might have gone.

The problem was, I wasn't in *any* of those places. The problem was, or rather, the whole thing *became* a problem, because, though I don't know if it's still true today, in the spring of 1983, it turns out there were *two* student unions on the sprawling campus of Vanderbilt University, and two-and-a-half, hours after my bus had left for Ft. Campbell, I was still waiting at the one Jenny knew nothing about, wondering what had become of *her*. I must confess that my first inclination was to anger, thinking that I had been forgotten. But by the time I finally reached her at the house, and heard her heaving sobs of relief, any irritation dissolved to simple *relief*. With the help of a student attendant who was as certain as the one Jenny had talked to earlier that *his* student union was the *only* student union on the Vanderbilt campus, I was able to give Jenny directions where to find me.

I suspect that there were plenty more tears shed on the return trip to Nashville, and I know for a fact that my own thankfulness that we had finally found one another was colored with worry that this episode would stain our still just growing relationship. But when Jenny pulled up in front of her second student union of the day, all the tears and all the regret and all the *guilt* was swallowed up in the joy of being once again in each other's arms. There were some more tears that evening, and there have been many more in the thirty-three-and-a-half years *since* that evening, but we had our feast that evening, a dinner at a really nice place called *Ireland's* that cost more than our combined budgets could possibly justify. What we had lost, we had found, and we had every reason to rejoice.

Though I understand from competent authority that the ten coins in Jesus's story were probably the dowry that guaranteed this woman's survival if something should happen to her husband, I'm not sure I fully understand how the discovery of an inanimate object can be analogous to heavenly joy. And though, as I've told you at some point, I have *some* experience working with sheep, I really have no frame of reference that would let me particularly understand the idea of leaving, as *Luke* tells it, leaving ninety-nine sheep in the *wilderness* to find the one that was lost. But, to be sure, I *do* know what it's like to be the one that is *lost*.

Now *maybe* the universe is so inclined, I don't think it is for a minute, but *maybe* like that tenth coin, I am lost for no reason at all, lost from the beginning of beginning, and have neither the ability, nor even the power of *will* to be otherwise.

But I find it far more *likely* that I am like that one hundredth *sheep*, and have gotten *myself* lost. You see, there have been times in my life when I didn't know where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. There have been times when I have just kind of carelessly wandered away from the Shepherd. There have been times when I have nibbled at what I *thought* were greener pastures, until I had lost my way altogether. And, to be honest, there have been times when I knew full *well* that I was heading down the wrong way, when I knew full *well* that the path I had chosen was the one that led to danger and isolation and destruction, when I knew full *well* – and I went there anyway.

Oh, I know how it feels to have found what I have lost, and I am thrilled that Jesus says that, “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” But, oh, dear friends, I know, I *know* how it feels to be the one lost lamb who has been found by my beloved. I know how it feels to be lifted, however unworthily, onto the Shepherd's broad, rejoicing shoulders. And I know, I *know* that I rejoice there now, and every *moment* of the journey, that I am already being carried... home.