

We're never quite sure where they make it off to, the socks that go missing in the wash. Somehow, between the time they leave the feet and are ready to be paired up again, they are simply not there. Not behind the machine, not stuck in the lint trap, and not buried deep in the mechanisms of the washer or dryer, not as far as we can tell, at least. My best guess is they get shot out the exhaust pipe, or they latch onto a pant leg, the inside, and then jump ship while you're out and about. Or perhaps they simply unravel. But they go missing, and we simply shrug our shoulders at this fact of life.

Tupperware lids, too, get lost without any obvious explanation. Well, that's what we say but the reality is, moms find the containers their kids took to school, or their husbands took to work, and they've returned home with the bottom portion only. So unless it's a mix and match style container, you might as well throw it away because you know all the searching in the world isn't going to find that mysteriously "missing" (really just forgotten) lid.

The thing that commonly went missing in my household growing up that we actually really cared to find was the remote for the TV. It alone had unique value that it had to be found, and we searched diligently because, well, it had to be nearby. I couldn't have moved it that far from the living room. Scott wouldn't have taken it outside the house at least. And I rightfully pit that on me because I'm sure it was my mindlessness, carrying it around the house, that caused its disappearance on the majority of occasions.

But it was of singular and vital importance. You couldn't enjoy watching TV without it. Unlike a sock, which you've got literally a bunch of bunches of, or Tupperwares, which were constantly being replaced, the TV remote made the laziness, I mean the relaxation, of watching TV possible. Otherwise you had to get up to change the volume, to switch channels as the commercials popped on, and nobody wants that.

So when you knew it was lost, you went on the hunt.

In today's readings, we learn that Jesus is on the hunt. Paul says that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of which he is the first and foremost, and in the parables He tells we must see that the shepherd searching for the sheep, the lady searching for the coin, they're Jesus as well.

But before we take a look at Jesus on the hunt, imagine for a second that sheep that is lost, the coin that has rolled off. Under the hot sun, roaming between the crags and over little peaks of the hills, this sheep has found himself helpless. He's followed his stomach and, while he's stumbled upon patches of luscious grass and a few refreshing brooks, as the day goes on he realizes he has made himself quite vulnerable and helpless. He's no hound dog able to sniff his way home, but he's wandered about aimlessly hoping to stumble right back into the fold he's since left. Or maybe more likely, he gets a little scared and then smells some more fresh grass and continues to wander wherever his heart desires, and he's more than oblivious to the wolf that's been stalking him and the massive drop that's just four steps away over the cliff.

And the coin, too, though much less sentient, has rolled itself between a rock and a hard place, or right under the living room rug, and it's useless at this point. Though it may have been worth a day's wages back in the hand of her owner, in this new world of dust and ants, it's not worth a penny. And even less than the sheep, this coin can't stumble back to the lady who needs her. At most the lady could step on her, or an earthquake could loosen this coin and send it rolling into sight, but as the situation stands, it's stuck and helpless and useless.

Back to the owners now, they are left with a conundrum, as, through no apparent fault of their own, they are now at a loss. If they forsake the sheep and coin, they've lost valuable income. If they go on the hunt, they risk even more loss, giving up a days' labor to hunt down a coin of the same value, or even more so risking the wandering of 99 more sheep just to find the one.

Jesus doesn't act like any reasonable man or woman. The average shepherd sees the 99 and recognizes that there's more wool on their coats, more meat on their flesh, than that one possible dead by this point sheep could ever provide. And that woman, her wisest course of action is to keep her eyes open and hope she just stumbles upon it.

Not so with Jesus.

He has no interest in cutting His losses to get the best return for a days' work. He is certainly willing to risk it all to make sure what is rightfully His is resting firmly in His care. His sheep will end up in the fold, His coins will be gathered onto His nightstand. ***He literally gives His all in order to gather His own—that is what the cross was, after all.***

And there was nothing special about the sheep or the money. It wasn't the prized mother; it wasn't the only twenty-dollar bill amongst a bunch of fivers. Jesus is on the hunt for what is His, for what is ordinary, for what got itself lost and might do the exact same thing again tomorrow.

And the Pharisees don't like it.

These parables, along with that of the Prodigal Son, arise because of their grumbling at the company Jesus keeps. They're tax collectors; they're sinners; they aren't the ones you should hang out with if you want to keep yourself clean and respectable. And yet Jesus has found Himself surrounded by them time and time again—"He receives sinners," the Pharisees mutter, "and even eats with them."

You're dang right, He does, you pharisees. In fact, you should know that they didn't just stumble onto Him, but He sought them out when the rest of the world would've written them off, saying they can join the party once they've found their way and cleaned themselves up.

Who deserves to keep the company of Jesus? Who deserves to hear God's Word (Christ) preached, to receive His gifts and to gather as His people?

We know the answer is none and all at the same time, that it's only by the mercy of God any of us may step in here, by the grace of the same that any may hear His Word and receive all

He has to offer, but when our actions reveal the theology of what we really believe, who is it that we believe should be in our midst?

It's not just those that look like us and talk like us and reason like us. It's not just those who, like we pretend most days, are able to cover up the darkest and most corrupted bits of our lives so everything seems okay, as if we've got a pretty good handle on life and sin and the like. It's not just those who seem to be able to give, who don't take up too much time or energy or compassion. It's not just those who will be a benefit to the family because they can fulfill this role or complete this task.

Plain and simple, Jesus is out to gather His beloved. Whether a business tycoon, a janitor, the Queen or a little child, an addict, a counsellor, a stay-at-home parent, and those who haven't quite figured out what they'll be. Those with great senses of humor and those that hate being in big groups and those that love people but just don't quite get them, those with diabetes and cancer and carpal tunnel just as much as those who've gotten Olympic gold in the high dive or climbed Mt. Everest. The single, the married, the divorced, the widowed, the straight, the gay, and the undecided, the liberal, the conservative, and Socialist, the Communist, and the Libertarian. Those still masked and those who are anti-vaxx, those who were practically born in the church, hearing His word every week and those who you couldn't seemingly pay to enter a holy place of God, you literally cannot find someone that Christ isn't out searching for.

And when He picks them up and carries them home, heaven rejoices.

He knows that each of these sheep may just up and wander down another path of fresh grass again tomorrow; these coins may stumble off the table and follow gravity's affects and become quite lost again. No matter. He rejoices, He throws a party simply because they are back right now and He has no hesitation to do it all over again.

Heaven rejoices each time you are turned around by your Saviour, as catches up to you and reminds you you are lost in your sin and need to trust in Him, as you are reminded of the grace from the cross that is entirely yours because He came to seek and save the lost, to redeem even the worst of sinners.

And He rejoices over everyone else just as much, and He invites your songs of celebration and jubilee too; come to the feast to celebrate their return. And watch out, because if you find yourself grumbling at who Christ has let in, that the angels shouldn't make such a big deal about so-and-so because their faith won't stick, or whatever reason, you might be a little further lost than you originally thought, but no matter, Christ is on the hunt even for us who haven't quite gotten it yet. He keeps on.

Church, we are the vehicle by which the others are sought out. Certainly He works miraculously, having His sheep stumble onto His Word online or in the library, or by having random-to-them thoughts about maybe visiting a church, and there are other Christians out there who will speak the Gospel to your neighbours as well, but just as we are invited to rejoice with Christ as He carries a lost one home, so through our baptism, through Holy Communion,

we are united with Christ and thus we also have the joy of going to search, to pass along the saving message of grace, and even taking their hand and guiding them home.

I'm not saying you all must quit your jobs or exit retirement to become full-time missionaries here in this town, but the reality is, through His body, Christ is continually going to seek the lost, to show compassion to the vulnerable, to be present with the lonely. It is our joy to be His hands and feet, not saving others, but proclaiming His saving work of the cross and the empty tomb to them.

And not because they are worth any more than we are, or because they'll keep it together once they're brought home, but simply because they are Christ's beloved creation, because He has already said "I love you" to them as He paid the price for their sins too.

All heaven rejoices that you are here, redeemed and returned home today. And wonder of wonders, there's still more joy to be had.

Amen.