

Talk for Sunday 15th March 2015
11.00am Family Worship at St Stephen's
Mothering Sunday.

John Beauchamp

Reading: Luke 15:3-6 – The lost sheep

Talk:

I can remember 2 incidents from my childhood when I got lost. One was when we were having a family holiday on Hayling Island in the very early 1960s. I'm not sure what it is like now, but then Hayling Island was just one enormous caravan park. There were thousands of caravans all full of people on holiday. One afternoon when we made our way back from the beach to the caravan I ran on ahead. I was only 4 or so and I was sure that I knew the way. Over the sandbank, through a gate and along a path. So off I went. As I ran along the path though to my horror I found myself surrounded by caravans I didn't recognise and people I didn't know. Somewhat terror struck I turned round and headed back to the beach but when I got there my family were nowhere to be seen. I can remember the wave of panic that flooded over me. I started to walk along the path by the beach and inevitably, remember I was only 4, I started to cry. I can remember a lady stopping me and asking if I was alright, to which I think I said: 'I've lost my Mummy!' She then said: 'where are you staying then?' To which I gave the inevitable answer, and remember there were thousands of caravans all over Hayling Island, 'In a caravan!'

It was of course not too long before I was found by my parents. When I went through the gate there were 2 paths, one to the right and one to the left, and I had taken the wrong one.

The next time was when I was 5 or possibly 6 and at school. Every afternoon my Mum would come to meet me at the school gate, but one day when I went out at half past three she wasn't there. I was with another boy who lived just around the corner from me and whose Mum wasn't there either. 'Don't worry,' he said, 'I know the way.' So off we set. Of course the inevitable happened, we got lost. We turned this corner and that corner and walked up street after street, and all the time I walked along thinking this boy knew where he was going. In the meantime of course my Mum turned up at the school gate, couldn't find me, and so panicked! She ran all the way home calling in on everyone she knew and every shop on the way to ask them to keep an eye out for me. The person who eventually found us was in fact a woman who ran a small sweet shop not far from where I lived. We were invited into the shop and given a large pile of sweets to work our way through while she waited for my Mum to run past again as she looked for me. (This was of course long before anyone had invented mobile phones and actually before we had a phone at home either!). Eventually I was found of course and taken home, and I have to say I was a fair bit older by the time I was trusted to walk home from school on my own again!

You may know that the reading this morning, the story of the lost sheep, is one of 3 lost and found stories in Luke chapter 15. There is the story of a woman who lost a precious coin and then swept every part of her house until she found it. Then the story we heard this morning of the shepherd who lost a sheep and so left his 99 other sheep to look for the one that was lost. And finally the story we heard at my induction here a week ago, the story of the lost or prodigal son. The son who took his inheritance from his father, went away, and squandered it

all before finding himself penniless, homeless and starving, but whose father was prepared to welcome him back into his family as a dearly loved son once again. In all these stories Jesus is teaching us about God's care for us. He is teaching us about how much God cares for us and what God is prepared to do to bring us back to himself when we get lost in our lives. Because, just like me as a young child, it is easy for us to think we know the right way to go in our lives. It is easy for us to go running on ahead without looking to God. It is easy for us to take the wrong path in our lives. To take the path that takes us away from God. Away from his care and his love and his guidance. It is easy for us to put our trust in the wrong people. To follow others who we think know the way, only to find that their way was definitely not the right way! It is very easy for us to get lost and find ourselves far away from God!

But God, says Jesus, is like a shepherd. A shepherd who cares for every single one of his sheep. A shepherd who will leave the 99 safe sheep and go out himself to look for the one who is lost. To look for them and bring them home with a heart full of rejoicing.

On this Mothering Sunday we give thanks for mothers, but we also give thanks for all those who have shown us the love of a mother no matter who they are. And it is the love of a mother that we see in these stories. This shepherd, as he strides out across the countryside calling and looking for his lost sheep, is a symbol, a picture, of the mother love of God. Love that never gives up, love that always seeks to pick us up, dust us off and bring us home, no matter how far we may have wandered from God's path. No matter how lost we may have become.

At some time in your life there will be someone who continues to believe in you when many others have lost faith. At some time in your life there will be someone who cares for you when others seem to have deserted you. At some time in your life there will be someone who continues to love you when others seem to have rejected you. At some time in your life there will be someone who is prepared to go out and look for you when you are lost. To look for you, find you, take you by the hand and lead you home. Whether you can look back on those times, or whether they are times yet to come for you, those are the people we give thanks for this Mothering Sunday. It may be your mother, it may be someone else, it may well be more than one person. It is all those who continue to care for you even when you are at your most obnoxious and continue to love you even when you are at your most unlovable!

The ultimate mother love is of course though shown to us by God himself. Our God, who in Jesus came to seek and save the lost and bring each of us home to know the fullness of his unconditional love for each of us. Our God, who in Jesus Christ is the good shepherd. The shepherd who looks for his sheep no matter how far they have wandered, and when he finds us, places us on his shoulder and, full of rejoicing, carries us home.

We give thanks today for God's incalculable and unfathomable mother love in the outstretched arms of Jesus Christ and we rejoice that we are his children and he is our perfect parent, now and for all eternity.

Let us pray:

Loving God,
For the mother love we have received from others,
We give you thanks.

Make us people who can share that same unconditional love with others as well.
For your mother love, we give you praise and thanksgiving.
May your arms enfold us, uphold us and guide us on your path,
Today and every day;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.