

Luke 15:3-10 – Lost sheep and coin  
21 June 2015

When I was perhaps 8 or 9 years old, my family, cousins, and uncle and aunt went to a woodland near the town where I lived. We lived in a garrison town, and the wood was frequently used by the army for training. In some areas the trees were dense and the ground dark, while in others there were clearings where the sun poured in, turning the grass golden. There was a river. The terrain undulated. The woodland provided an ideal mix of environments for young army recruits to hide and test their camouflage skills. It was also an ideal place for families to go on Saturday afternoons to explore, walk their dogs and have a picnic.

I can't remember why, at this distance of some 25 or 30 years, but at some point I wandered away from the others. Away from my parents and sister, away from my uncle and aunt, away from my cousins. Perhaps we were playing hide and seek. Perhaps I had gone exploring. Perhaps I was just being difficult. But for whatever reason, I wandered off deep into the woods, skirting along the side of the river – little more a big stream, really – far away from the carpark and the clearing where people played Frisbee and dogs chased sticks and each other.

I can't now recall when I realized it, or how it crept up on me, but I do remember very distinctly the feeling when I realized that I was lost. The panic rose through my gut. It was terrifying. I did not know where I was. I had lost my bearings. I couldn't find my way back. I couldn't even retrace my steps. I had no idea where I was.

I walked around aimlessly for what felt like a very long time, traipsing through the dark forest, hoping to find someone, anyone, who might take me back to my parents, back to somewhere I knew, back home. I began to think I might have to sleep in the wood that night, in the cold and the dark. Lost. Totally lost.

In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus speaks of the shepherd and the woman. He speaks of their frantic searching. Of the lengths they went to to find their sheep and their coin, even to the extent of leaving their other charges, of turning their house upside down. And he speaks of the shepherd's joy, and the woman's joy, of finding that which they had lost. Such is the joy in heaven.

Fortunately, eventually, after what seemed like an age, one of my cousins found me. They were calling my name through the trees. I was so relieved. The panic subdued. I was found. All I had to worry about was my parents anger that I had wandered off in the first place!

What does it mean to be found? It is to repent. What does that mean? It can be wrapped up in great theological thinking. But I think it can be stated quite simply. It is to be reunited. Reunited with Him who seeks you. To be reunited with God. To be in a relationship with God. To find yourself on the right path –

not necessarily one you have trod before or know, but one that leads surely to wholeness and peace, peace with oneself, peace with one-another, and peace with God.

But there is another message here.

When I think back to when I was lost, and when I was found, all that I can remember is my own joy. My own sense of being reunited.

But the joy in these parables is not the joy the individual who is found – though profound that joy must be. It is the joy of their friends and neighbours, it is the joy of a community, the joy of the church, the joy of all of us, when one of us is reunited.

And it is an instruction: Rejoice with me. It is a duty, a happy duty, to be filled with joy.

When one is found, so we are all to celebrate. We are called to be a people filled with joy.