

IX Trinity 2022

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*I Cor. 10.1-13 St. Luke 15.11-32*



How often do we see this sign posted in store windows: “Not responsible for lost or stolen items”? If the item we just lost is valuable...our drivers license, passport, or cash...wouldn't we make every effort to find it? When we find what was lost...wouldn't we celebrate?

The Story of the Prodigal or Lost Son is the third part of the trilogy that includes the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. We heard the first two parts on the Third Sunday after Trinity. Each of these stories is a feel-good story. We have all lost valuable items and we understand the sense of relief the virtual characters in the stories felt when they found what was loss.

In the Story of the Lost Sheep...a farmer goes looking for one sheep that has wandered off. Sheep were a valuable commodity. He leaves the 99 other sheep safe in the sheep pen. When he finds the lost sheep...he carries it home to the safety of the sheep pen. Then it's celebration time.

In the Story of the Lost Coin...a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. The silver coin was far more valuable than a sheep. She turns the house upside down looking for the coin. When she finds it...she calls her friends over for a celebration.

Jesus begins the story of the Lost Son by telling us there was a man who had two sons. The younger son asks his father to give him his share of the property. He would have received one-third of the property upon his father's death. Jesus never says the younger son wished his father dead...he just wants his share of the property so he can sell it and set off on his own with the money.

There is a surprise element to the story...Jesus tells us the father divided his property equally between his two sons. The older son received his inheritance ahead of time. Both sons received half the property. It's left to our imaginations what the older son did with his share of the property.

We know how the rest of the story goes. The young son wasted his money with extravagant living in a foreign country far away from home. *Prodigal*, means wasteful and extravagant. His reckless living has left him destitute. When the country is hit by famine...the young man is forced to work feeding pigs. Pigs were unclean...but he wishes he had the pig food to eat.

Our Lost Son comes to his senses when he admits he has messed up and the only way out is to go back home. He thinks he has messed up so bad God can't forgive

him...certainly his father won't forgive him either. He will discover to how wrong he is in thinking he is lost forever.

On the long journey home he rehearses the speech he plans on giving his dad..."I'm no longer your son...treat me like a hired worker." He thinks maybe his dad will put him to work in the fields...at least he would have enough to eat.

There is another surprise element to the story. His dad sees him far of in the distance and runs out to greet him. He never gives his son a chance to give the speech he rehearsed. He throws his arms around his son, kisses him, and instructs his workers to prepare a great feast...telling them, "My son was dead and alive again; he was lost but now he has been found."

What about the older son? He is the often-ignored character in the story. When he learns his younger brother has returned he becomes enraged and refuses to take part in the celebration. He is angry with his father for showing compassion and mercy toward his younger brother. He treats his younger brother as if he was dead...referring to his as "this son of yours". His dad assures him he loves him as much as his younger brother. The older brother expects to be rewarded for being a "good son". Love, mercy and compassion are missing from his life...he wants no part of the celebration.

Jesus tells short stories like this because he wants us to learn something from them. The stories of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son are ultimately about loss and redemption...God's infinite capacity to show mercy...and his refusal to limit the measure of his grace...even when we don't deserve it. This becomes abundantly clear in the Story of the Lost Son.

There is another surprise element to the story of the Lost Son. The Jewish teachers of Jesus' time believed God forgave the repentant sinner. The new and radical part of Jesus' teaching...God comes looking for the sinner so he can bring him back home.

Redemption is a gift from God. We sometimes lose our way in life. We can experience what we might think is permanent separation from God and others because we have placed ourselves in untenable situations. The point of the Story of the Lost Son is we are never so far beyond God's reach he can't find us or help us. We are always on his mind and in his loving care.

The Church is God's Lost and Found Department on earth. The sign reads, "I'm God and I'm responsible for lost people". The Good News is we don't have to stay lost. God celebrates our homecoming...we also have every reason to celebrate...so let the celebration begin!

