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## Does God Lose Things?

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**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**Proper 19C**  
**Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28**  
**Luke 15:1-10**

*Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them,  
does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness  
and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? -Luke 15:4*

Jesus Christ, why can't I find that piece of paper! I have a hundred papers on my desk right now, and I know where almost every single one is. Except the one I am looking for! I can't find it! I have lost it again.

And that bill. I know I opened it yesterday, set it aside so I could tend to it; but now it's gone.

And where did I put my car keys? I always have them either on the kitchen table, or in my pocket. Where are they now?

Oh no, my wallet. It is supposed to be in my front breast pocket; but it's not there now.

Why is that I always seem to be losing things? They go missing. I seem to have a hundred socks in my dresser drawer, but none of them matches another one. The one book I need for my sermon is nowhere to be found.

Not a day, not a single day goes by, when I am not realizing that I have lost something. It may be lost for only a few minutes, but my search entirely consumes those few minutes. I can't do anything else except search and seek. If my search lasts more than ten minutes, it seems that my entire day is lost.

I lose things on a daily basis. And, in the larger life, I lose bigger things than just car keys and wallets, don't I? In my younger years, I lost many a girlfriend. I have lost relationships. I have lost jobs. I have lost bids. I have lost elections. I have almost lost my hearing! I have lost physical agility. I have lost family members.

In my spiritual prayer, I yearn for the perfected life. Wouldn't the perfect life be one where there is no anxiety or loss? Where I can experience perfect peace and stability? In the kingdom of God, wouldn't I be free from loss? In the perfect life?

Well, in this respect, let's check out these parables of Jesus. The fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke makes some surprising analogies. Jesus says that when a shepherd loses one sheep out of a hundred, he leaves the other ninety-nine in the wilderness and searches earnestly for that one lost sheep. When a woman loses one coin out of ten, she scours the house, looking carefully until she finds it. These two parables are followed, in the Gospel of Luke, by one of the grandest

parables of all: the parable of the prodigal son and father. That parable involves a lost son. It ends with the father rejoicing, just like the shepherd and the woman. The father rejoices and says, "My son was lost and now he is found! I had to rejoice!"

The fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke is about lost things. Yes, in each of the three parables"about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son"the story ends with rejoicing. But the thing that strikes me is what happens first. What happens first is that something gets lost.

It's as if Jesus is saying something startling, as if he is admitting something. In the kingdom of God, things get lost. Sheep stray. Coins hide under the sofa cushions. Children run away from their parents.

Yes, even in the kingdom of God, things get lost. Which is to say: even God loses things.

The biblical record is replete with such losses. Even God, the great God of the Old and the New Testaments, loses people. Did you hear the first lesson for today? The one from Jeremiah, where that great prophet laments the ignorance of the people of God?

Listen again to how Jeremiah speaks the words of God:

*"For my people are foolish,  
they do not know me;  
they are stupid children,  
they have no understanding.  
They are skilled in doing evil,  
but do not know how to do good."* - Jeremiah 4:22

Even if they have not said those exact words out loud, many a parent, in today's world, may have thought those words. How come my people are so foolish?

One way of reading the Old Testament is by seeing it as one long search. Over and over again, God is searching for his people. In fact, we can read the entire Bible that way. The Bible is a record of God's search for humanity. Over and over again, no matter how silly humanity has acted, or how awfully humanity has acted, God seeks us out again. God comes after us. God forgives us. God takes us back. Over and over again.

God, our great and glorious God, is in the Lost and Found business. And that means that we, this Christian community, are in the Lost and Found business, too. This community is in the Lost and Found business. We are losing things all the time. Some of us have lost our health. Some of us have lost our jobs. Some of us have lost our marriages. Some of us have lost our loved ones. Some of us have lost our confidence. We live in a world that loses justice and mercy and peace.

Those losses do not mean we have failed forever. They mean that we are ready for something else. We are ready to depend upon an amazing and ever-loving God. We are ready for a God who is ever-searching, always seeking out the lost sheep and the lost child. And God cannot find us until we admit that we have lost something. God cannot find us until we admit that we are lost.

What have we lost today? Who have we lost? Maybe the better question is this: what has God lost? What is God searching for today? What is God searching for in you? What is God searching for in the world?

God is in the Lost and Found business. And God wants to find. God wants to find, just like the shepherd and the woman and the father in Luke's parables. Whatever it is in you that is lost, God wants to find it. Whatever it is in the wider world that is lost, God wants to find it"and God uses our help in this world to find those things that are lost!

Welcome to church here. We are not a place where everything is perfected and stable. We are a place where things are lost, and where we can admit that things are lost. Over and over again.

But, over and over again, we are also a place where things are found. God not only loses things in this world, but God finds

them, over and over again. Welcome to church, a small glimpse of the kingdom of God, where what was lost is found. We find what was lost here, and we rejoice in that discovery, over and over again.

AMEN.

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