

**Is It Worth Looking For?
Luke 15:1-10**

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I know it is here.

Somewhere around here!

But I am sure it is here.

Does that sound familiar to you? How much of your life is spent answering that question? Where is it?

My guess is more than we want to confess!

Where is my homework?

Where are my shoes?

Where is my green dress?

Where are those contracts I was working on?

Where are my glasses?

Where are the car keys?

Where is my wallet?

Where is that book, you know the one that I was reading last night?

Where is a parking place?

Where is the remote?

Where is my car? Where is my computer?

Where is.....

It may be THE most asked question in the world. I know it is in my life! Having just moved into the parsonage (which is lovely) Anita and I are still going through boxes, putting things away. And many times, I just can't find that thing I am looking for! I don't remember where we put it in the kitchen. Anita keeps thinking that maybe the cereal would work better there, where the coffee was. I spend a lot of time looking for things!

And that is the stuff that is here! A lot of our things are in a storage unit in Memphis. So part of our adventure is discovering what is here, and what it there! I spend time looking for something, only to discover/remember that it didn't make the trip!

Last Sunday I left worship and walked home. I was taking my keys out of my pocket and realized that the key to my office was missing. I went back through my pockets, checked my backpack, looked in my pockets again....but nothing! I thought, maybe I left them in the office door. When I came in Tuesday I realized they weren't there, and no one

had seen them. I thought, I will look again when I get home. At some point, I was looking on my bookshelf and, VOILA! There they were! Right there with the microphone! Right where I left them when I emptied my pockets after worship.

Oh we spend so much time looking--for stuff. How much? Well, John Ortberg's estimates that we spend sixteen minutes a day (roughly one year of our lives) looking for lost possessions.

According to another study conducted by a Boston Marketing firm, the average American burns 55 minutes a day looking for things they know they own but cannot find. That adds up to a total of almost 14 days a year people spend just trying to find lost things.

A survey by the holiday company Ocean Village claims that we clock in 31 minutes a day hunting for lost things - remote controllers (5 minutes), keys (10 minutes), socks and shoes (7 minutes), lottery tickets (4 minutes) and passports (1 minute) and 17 minutes shouting "you had it last".¹

AT some point, don't you think we need to stop and just ask the question, Is it really worth looking for?

Oh, some things, most definitely! We need to find that contract that you have worked on for a month and is buried underneath the pile of other contracts you are working on that are piled on your desk. I hope a surgeon will find that last sponge that she is pretty sure she took out, but just isn't accounted for. We need to find our left shoe, my car keys which also has the house key, the office key, as well as a key to the church. We must find the remote control--because how else can you change the channel anymore!

But is it really worth it?

At some point, that had to have been the response of those who first heard Jesus tell these parables. He has just had supper with the Pharisees, but now he is hanging out with tax collectors and sinners--as if there is a difference! In fact, the Pharisees would probably have preferred the sinners rather than those people who had chosen to team up with the Romans to steal their money! Tax collectors! Sinners! If Jesus were a real prophet he would know what kind of people they are! If he were a real man of God he would never ever be seen with them.

So Jesus tells them a story. He asks a question. Which one of you...

It is a way right off the bat of constructing the story to have them agree with him..

Which one of you, if you had 100 sheep and realized that one was missing wouldn't leave the 99 and go and find that 1 that was lost?

And which one of you, if you were a woman who had 10 coins and lost 1, wouldn't you turn the house upside down and clean and sweep until you found it? And when you found it, wouldn't you throw a party and invite all your friends? Wouldn't you do that?

And before they knew what they were doing, they were all nodding in agreement. "Yeah, I would!"

¹ <http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20101108160059AAAbEbDB>

Until they walked away!

And thought.

Wait a second! No I wouldn't! If I had 100 sheep, (if only) and I lost one...I wouldn't leave the whole flock out in the middle of a field! I would take the rest of them back to the pen, and then, if there were enough sunlight, then I might go out and look for that one! Seriously, who risks losing 99 sheep for 1? Even, even if was a prize winning sheep, would you really risk losing the rest? And what if it was being eaten by wolves? They would just eat you too!

No! I know I said I would, but there is no way!

And, and, if I lost one coin, I might clean the house and look for it and everything, but when I found it I wouldn't throw a party and invite the whole neighborhood! That would cost more than the coin I found!

I know I said I would, there there is no way! I mean seriously, that is just stupid! Risk 99 sheep for one? Spend more on a party than the coin I find? It just isn't worth that!

And they were right! It isn't worth it...not in our world, not in our way of thinking! That is just ridiculous, to risk 99 in the field for one in the bush! It is just not good economics to throw that kind of money away! That's just not good thinking!

But Jesus is always calling our thinking into question. Jesus is saying that in kingdom thinking, the value isn't always apparent at first glance. In kingdom thinking, value isn't registered in debits and credits. In kingdom thinking we have to look for something that is really lost. In kingdom thinking we have to ask what it is we are looking for.

And that is where we get a bit uncomfortable, don't we. This is one of those stories where we really do want this story to be about Jesus--the one who comes looking for us! We want to say "This is what this story is about!"

But the problem with parables is that you can never say, "This is what it is about!" There are always other options, other ways of looking at the story. And here, it is just as legitimate to see ourselves as the one looking. Do we think it is worth looking for that one lost sheep, that one lost coin?

Or would we rather look for something else? What is it that you are looking for?

Oh, that is the question that we hear in U2's song, *Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*, isn't it. We scale mountains, swim seas, do everything, but still don't find it--whatever **it** is! And maybe that, that is the question!

What is it you are looking for?

Frederich Buechner, the wonderful preacher/writer who died recently, asks that question, saying that it is perhaps THE question of the journey of life. He says:

Each must say for himself what he searches for, and there will be as many answers as there are searchers, but perhaps there are certain general answers that will do for us all. We search for a self to be. We search for other selves to love. We search for work to do. And since even when to one degree or another we find these things, we find also that there is still

something crucial missing which we have not found, we search for that unfound thing too, even though we do not know its name or where it is to be found or even if it is to be found at all.²

We all look for that unfound thing, even if we don't know its name. Could it be that what we are looking for is to be found ourselves? Could it be that we want to know that the God who created us, is looking for us? Even when we don't know we are lost?

When I was a little boy our family always went to the beach on vacation. We would rent the same house year after year. It was a red house with parking underneath and a porch overlooking the beach. It was sorta out by itself and was wonderful.

But one year, when I was about 6 or 7, we came down and discovered that it was no longer out there by itself! Other houses had been built around it, and some of them had a porch overlooking the beach, parking underneath and and worst of all, several of them were red!

How would I ever find our house? To remedy the situation my father put a flag--a checkered flag--out in front of the house. That way, if I ever got lost, he said, I would know which house was ours.

It was a wonderful week. I remember building sand castles and rafting and just loving the beach. But one day...

One day I wandered down the beach. There were some other children I had met and I was going to go down and play with them, but they weren't at their house...so i just sat down and played at their hours! They had some wonderful dig in the sand toys, and I was as happy as a clam!

I didn't know I was lost!

Until my parents came running up, grabbed me in a huge hug, and carried me back to the house! They were so happy to see me they never asked how I had gotten down the beach, why I had not come back to the house with the checkered flag. They really didn't care! They just knew I had been found.

I didn't know I had been lost! But I still remember being found!

Isn't that what we all want to know, to feel? Isn't that, what we are really looking for?

Where is my homework?

Where are my car keys?

Where is my hair bow?

Where is my blue shirt?

Where is my right shoe?

² <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/page-group/landing/blog/Blog-We-Search>

Has anybody seen...

This week those questions will resonate through our homes. We will spend so much time, so much life looking for stuff. And when we find it, we will go on with our lives looking for the next thing.

We will go on looking for....

Some of it will be just stuff--stuff that if we never find we might miss for a few minutes but won't really matter. But some of it.. matters ultimately. You matter ultimately.

And the good news is that God is going to continue looking for you, tracking you down through rain and snow, and fog and dark of night. God is going to continue looking in the cabinets and drawers and under the couch and refrigerator and stove and in the garage and even the attic. God is going to look for you--because you matter! You matter ultimately!

And when you are found, truly found, there will be a celebration in heaven, but even more, in your soul!

May it be today?

Amen.