

Sermon for Pentecost XIV Year C 2025
Getting Lost

You could say the parables of today's gospel lesson highlights two ways to get lost.

Neither of them is recommended and yet both are universal and unavoidable.

The first is to get lost like a sheep.

Head down, eat some grass, spot the next tuft, move, munch, repeat . . . until one day you look up, have no idea where you are, and discover . . . you're lost.

The other way we get lost is to be suddenly and unceremoniously dropped by life right on our heads . . . or on our tails . . . like a coin.

In one sudden and painful crash, sometimes followed by a brief or extended, wobbling roll, we find ourselves concussed and wedged in some unexpected, unknown, and very undesirable spot.

Head spinning. Lost.

Many of you are nodding your heads.

We've all wandered off like sheep.

We've all been dropped on our heads by life, like a coin.

We've all been lost.

Many of us feel lost right now!

(Even Jesus was "lost" for a while as a young boy according to the author of the gospel of Luke.)

So why do we pretend for the world that we are not lost?

Why do we, like the Pharisees and the Scribes in this story, not admit to wandering off inadvertently or that life has dropped us on our head and we feel like we've rolled into some deep, dark, life-crisis crevasse?

Why is it, that when we are asked, "how are you doing"

we generally respond with, "Oh, I'm okay . . . I'm fine . . .

I'm hanging in there" or some other culturally appropriate euphemism

When the truth is . . . I'm lost!

Jesus knew being lost was not just a “tax collector” thing
or a “sinner” thing . . . it was then and is now,
an every human being thing.
Every single solitary one of us wanders off and gets lost . . .
not just once in a while . . . but all the time!
Every single one of us goes from being just fine, safe, and secure
in the cozy coin-purse of life one minute,
to being suddenly and sometimes even terrifyingly dropped hard on the
floor, rolling to who knows where, and completely lost in the next.
And sometimes it feels like we aren’t just the coin of a careful, tidy
woman who only drops us once.
No! All too often this life feels like we’re a coin belonging to a
fumble-finger who drops us hard on our heads,
over and over and over and over again.

Perhaps we should try to find ways to say—even if it’s only to
ourselves—“I’m lost” when that’s what we are.
No more “I’m hanging in there” when you’re only hanging by a thread.
No saying “I’m okay” when we feel painfully alone.
As individuals, there isn’t anybody here in this place, in this flock,
who has never been lost . . . multiple times—
even multiple times this week.

True, what I’m suggesting is somewhat scary—both being lost and even
more so being honest about it.
Yet here’s why I think it’s important to do both.
Because it is both God’s specialty and God’s great joy to find us when
we are lost, to scoop us up, bring us home, and throw
a great big heavenly party to celebrate!
This gospel tells us that God is both good at finding the lost
but even more God loves doing it!
We can brave being honest because getting lost is simply part of being
human and finding the lost is simply part of being the Divine.
It is literally a match made in heaven!

But, you may say, what about when it's my fault I got lost?
Maybe I wasn't just dropped by life.
Maybe I chose to wander off course.
God doesn't care!
Because finding the lost, however they got that way, is God's great joy.

But, you say, I get lost all the time, for the same reason, over and over
and over again and never seem to learn my lesson.
Again, I can't emphasize this enough . . .
It is God's great heaven-sized, call the angels to rejoice joy to find you
over and over and over again just as often as you might wander off
or as often as the great fumble-fingers of life drops you on your head or
your tail like a coin.
How ever many times you get lost . . . that is how many times God will
revel in the joy of finding you, bringing you back
and throwing another party!

Here in church we call that grace.
And you and I even as highly imperfect, perpetually lost,
and repeatedly dropped on our heads followers of Jesus—
we are not only called to give thanks for the grace
that finds us over and over again
but we are also called to make grace *our* specialty and *our* joy as well.

Of course, individually we have no chance
of finding our way out of a paper bag
let alone a lost sheep, coin, family member, friend, or neighbor.
Individually we are just as lost as
the person sitting right next to you right now.

Individually, we are indeed nearly perpetually lost but together,
together we are nothing less than the Body of Christ.
Together, in some mystical way, we are the Good Shepherd
equipped with the specialty of finding the lost,
hoisting them up on our shoulders and bringing them home to a party.

Together in that same mystical way, we are caught up and part of the joy that Jesus experienced in searching, finding and rejoicing.

They are three different actions and moments in time but all three are manifestations of God's one grace.

They are the ongoing presence of God in Christ in each one of our lives. Both when we are lost and being found and when we are finding the lost. In searching, finding, and rejoicing we experience God's grace for the lost.

As I said, individually we are and can only be totally lost.

But together . . . as members and friends, young and old, in this family of faith,

together we are nothing less than the Body of Christ, gifted by grace and with grace to share with our neighbors.

And grace, it turns out, is exactly what our world most desperately needs right now.