

Reflection

Lord,

Open our deaf ears, and give sight to our blind eyes.

**That we may receive your word of grace, and
rejoice to see your coming kingdom. Amen**

We have heard a lot of parables recently, which is not surprising seeing we are told that it was a common technique used by Jesus. Oral tradition. We heard two short ones this morning, although the section from the lectionary does not include perhaps the most famous one: 'the prodigal son'/or the two brothers. All have a similar theme-about being lost and found-and then throwing a party in celebration!

The word 'parable' from the Greek word *'parabole'* means literally *'that which is tossed alongside'*

'At its simplest, a parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the reader by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving them in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought' C H Dodd

Trust an academic to complicate an interesting, often provocative short story.

In the scriptures word the 'Parable' has a wide range of uses: proverbs, bywords, allegories, riddles, figurative speech and stories.

The church has always had some difficulty with the parables of Jesus. There are none in John's Gospel. John prefers to speak of Jesus using 'figurative speech'

Nevertheless there are plenty of examples in the other Gospels.

Quite a few years ago we had a small group of Chinese students come to this church.

They were renting rooms in the area.

They were keen to learn about Christianity and improve their English.

Both were challenging experiences. Especially the Christianity bit-most of their information came from the internet!

Steve Francis -ESL Bible classes-kindly offered to invite some of our students to his Friday nights classes he was running at Nedlands. They had lots of foreign doing ESL Bible classes. So we took a group along.

One night that we went the focus was on the parable of the lost coin.

Themes of loss, search, completion, and joy. The stories end with feasting and rejoicing.

Finding the loss, whether they are sheep or coins, takes effort and from those efforts there is the potential for wholeness and joy.

“The joy of discovery” was the overall theme of the night.

In Jesus’ day many of the houses were dark and somewhat dingy. Most houses only had one small window and the earth floor would have been covered with dried reeds making it very difficult to search for a small coin.

Discussion followed along the reasons why the women would have been so eager to find the coin

1. **Necessity.** It seems that one silver coin represented at least one day’s wage for a working labourer. In Australian terms that probably would be over \$100. To someone who was living on the edge of poverty losing a silver coin probably meant the family would have to do without food for a day or more.
2. **Sentimentality.** In Jesus’ day a married woman would sometimes wear a head dress made from ten silver coins linked together by a silver chain.

This practice is still common in the Middle East and Asia.

It would be her most prized possession, perhaps equivalent to a wedding ring. Either way the woman would be almost desperate to find the missing coin.

Conversation about “sentimentality” – to our surprise one of our students, who was trying out for the WA ballet company, said one of his most important thing was a series of exercise books that contained important illustrations of ballet steps given to him by a teacher. It was the equivalent of the woman’s coin these books were very important to him.

One the aspects of being with those students is how much we speech so much in similes and expressions.

One was the expression ‘hold your horses’! When one of our students heard this he was mystified and asked what does it mean? It means to slow down we explained. This really captivated him. So much so he was keen to use it as much as possible. Not long after that went to a quiz night and if the quiz master was going too fast, he was keen to yell out his knew found English expression-‘hold your horses’ he would call out!

Behind these parables is a radical new idea. In Jesus’ day and indeed perhaps for some people today, people think that we have to search for God. Jesus told this

story to plant a new thought; there is a God and this God searches for us, just like the woman in the story searched for her lost coin or the shepherd his lost sheep.

God is a seeking and searching God, hoping that we might make the wonderful discovery that God loves and cares for us.

When anyone discovers the care and loving concern of God there is cause for celebration in heaven.

The parable is framed well with the introduction at 15:1-2. Those verses set up the occasion for all three parables to follow (the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son/the lost son). Jesus is accused by the Pharisees and scribes of drastically inappropriate conduct: "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." The challenge is put forth, and Jesus responds with parables that, in effect, speak of God as one who welcomes sinners. Jesus, in his own ministry, impersonates the divine welcome by receiving and eating with sinners.

The parables start with life as lived: a shepherd loses one of a flock of sheep; a woman loses one of her ten coins. What is described is not their "repentance" at all, but the absolute commitment of the person to *finding them again*. Action verbs predominate for the shepherd, and not the sheep: leave, go after, finds,

lays it on his shoulders, rejoices, comes home, and calls together his friends. The same holds for the woman: light a lamp, sweep the house, search carefully, finds, and calls together her friends. The parallels here show that the emphasis is on the *finding* and the one committed to find the otherwise hapless lost sheep and passive lost coin. As a way of re-framing the concern of Jesus' opponents, however, it leads to a stunning *theological* conclusion in both parables in our pericope: "there will be more joy in heaven" and "joy in the presence of the angels of God." As near as I can tell, neither lost sheep or lost coins can really repent. But the parable reveals a divine point of view that reframes why seeking and finding *matter*.

The searching shepherd in the first parable: "The parable presents a main figure - the owner, not the sheep - who realizes he has lost something of value to him. He notices the single missing sheep among the ninety-nine in the wilderness. For him, the missing sheep, whether it is one of a hundred or a million, makes the flock incomplete. He engages in an exaggerated search, and when he has found the sheep, he engages in an equally exaggerated sense of rejoicing, first by himself, and then with his friends and neighbours

For many of us, these parables bring comfort and reassurance of God's love and grace for all people. For

the religious leaders to whom Jesus was speaking, these parables were reminders of how different their vision of others was from God's. Perhaps, these comforting parables can also challenge us to be more aware of the ways in which we judge and exclude others.

As with most of Jesus' parables, there is a "hook," something that seems out of place. That hook lies in a certain lavishness in the celebrations. In the ancient world, "rejoicing" implies eating. Would a shepherd really throw a party over the finding of a lost sheep? ("Which one of you" does not do so?) If the lost coin so concerns the woman, are we to expect her to endure the expense of a party? ("What woman" would not?) As with most parables, this "hook invites us to recognize the extravagant joy with which God, present in Christ, welcomes all types of people.

The promise that God is still desperately searching, sweeping, and looking for God's lost and beloved children and won't quit until we're all found.

May God bless you with the clarity to recognize the world as it is, the hope to dream God's dream together, and the power to make God's dream a reality here and now. Amen.