

Sunday, September 15, 2013: Luke 15:1-10

by [Shauna K. Hannan](#) in the [September 4, 2013](#) issue

There is something gratifying about finding something that's lost or hidden. In the popular game of geocaching, adults go on high-tech treasure hunts and use a GPS to find a geocache (a box or container of theme-related tokens or information). There are over a million geocaches hidden worldwide, including some in the Highlands of Scotland. Apparently the thrill of hide-and-seek does not end when childhood ends.

It is even more gratifying when the "thing" we find is a lost person. As the oldest child of five, I was often told to keep an eye on my younger siblings when we were away from home. The task became part of my DNA. I would count, "One . . . two . . . three . . . four children," and breathe a sigh of relief when I reached four. Large department stores and amusement parks worried me the most. There were times when my mom would turn around at the cash register and ask, "Where's Brent?" My heart would sink, and I'd immediately begin looking up and down the aisles. What a relief it was when I spotted my little brother playing with a truck in the toy aisle. While he did not even know he was lost, I rejoiced in his being found.

The joy wiped away any need for a lesson about the importance of staying close to the other brothers and sisters. Nothing else mattered but this strong pull to rejoice over the found object—or in this case, the found and beloved little brother.

I have seen the same expression of joy on the faces of those who have found someone after a tornado whips through a city or a storm brings floodwaters. Everything else might still be lost, but recovering just one person is cause for rejoicing.

If we know this feeling, imagine God's delight when a lost child is found. This is why Jesus tells this story. It is about the rejoicing Divine—our God. God's rejoicing is—well, abnormal. Imagine a shepherd leaving 99 sheep to find one. Still more preposterous is the thought of the shepherd leaving the 99 untended in the wilderness while he goes to search for the lost one. After finding the stray sheep the shepherd invites the town to celebrate. That must have been one special sheep!

Yet I know the feeling of wanting to run up and down the aisles of SuperValu yelling, “I found my brother. He is found!” (I did not do this.) I wanted everyone to stop what he or she was doing and join in the communal celebration. This is what God does. Crazy, right? Crazy in love with one repentant sinner—that’s our God.

This lesson is so important that Jesus tells two more similar parables. While this trilogy of parables is sometimes labeled the “lost parables,” I suggest we call them the “found parables,” for the emphasis is more on the finding that God does than on the lost sinners. In the second of the three parables, a woman with silver coins goes searching for a lost coin. Once she finds the coin she acts like the shepherd and throws a party. Can you imagine finding a dime and calling all of your neighbors together to celebrate? Yes, perhaps the parties were looking for a reason to get together and relax. But isn’t the response a little much? It’s extravagant. So is our God when it comes to us.

While the emphasis is on God the Finder, it is also on the lost ones who have been found. If Jesus did not want us to consider this, he would not have added the concluding phrase in each situation about the joy to be experienced when one sinner repents. Of course, neither the sheep nor the coin did anything to help the finder; each continued to be an object, albeit a prized object, of discovery. And once found, the sheep is cozily lying on the shepherd’s shoulders and the coin is safely tucked in the woman’s hand.

But what about us, what does it mean to be found by God, the chief of the search and rescue unit? To be sure, some of us were playing with our trucks in the toy aisle and had no idea that we were lost. In this case, being found may not have had much impact. Oh, to be a child who knows that the parent (or sibling) will search endlessly. That’s us!

Others of us may have a sharp recognition of our own lostness. Oh, to recognize how far we’ve come as a result of God’s never-failing search! That’s us too. Either way, our lives are transformed by being found.

God, the shepherd and the woman with the coins had the right idea. Extravagant celebration, with all friends and neighbors invited, is the order of this day and every day. It’s party time!