

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 14 September 2025, the 13th Sunday after Trinity

Collect *(the Church's prayer for today):*

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the
world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of
your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the
cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Or

Almighty God,
you search us and know us:
may we rely on you in strength
and rest on you in weakness,
now and in all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Readings: 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Today's reflection is by Reader Cal Bailey.

Who's Missing?

Jo and I are going on holiday to France tonight. I booked the ferry tickets about 4 weeks ago. But until 2 weeks ago, I couldn't be sure we'd actually go, because I'd lost my passport!

Of course I searched for it. Fairly frantically. For several days. Then I found it, clipped to all the receipts from our last holiday, for some reason. What relief! And delight! You might think Jo would be better off planning to go on holiday with someone else. You'd be right!

I'm sure we can all tell stories of losing things. But our gospel today isn't really about that. It's about people being lost. I wonder when you have felt lost?

There are 3 occasions I remembering feeling very lost. The first was when we went on a rather special holiday to New York when I was 13. I lost my parents while we were touring the Empire State Building, on the 86th floor, which is the public viewing platform. I felt very frightened.

The second time was at university, when I was studying philosophy in order to check that my faith wasn't foolish. I was ridiculed by one of my tutors, and the more I thought about it, the more I agreed with him. I gave up believing in God. I felt very alone and very lonely in a large, cold and unwelcoming universe. During this period a kind Australian became a friend. He turned out to be a Christian graduate studying philosophy who knew my tutor very well. We met many times, and he took me deeper into the subjects which troubled me than my tutor ever had. Gradually my faith returned, stronger and richer than before.

The third time was when my engagement to a woman called Fiona was called off 12 days before our wedding. I felt unloved and unlovable.

Feeling lost, lonely, and unloved is not a happy place to be for anyone.

Today's gospel contains 2 stories about being lost; one is about a man, the other about a woman. One takes place indoors, one outdoors. These stories are for everyone, and everywhere. They are for you, especially if you feel lost.

And these stories summarise the whole gospel, the whole story of God and humankind. I will try to explain why. They are stories about God. They tell us 3 things about God.

Firstly, the stories tell us that God wants restoration in this world. In both our stories, the owners find the possession they had lost. The lost sheep and the lost coin are restored to the shepherd and to the woman.

We live in a world in which much isn't how it should be. People get ill and die. Thieves break in and steal. Families have rows and break apart. As a result, we get separated from members of our family, from friends and from possessions.

It isn't hard to believe that, if God created our world, then He isn't happy with what's gone wrong. Jesus is God, coming to begin the process of putting it right; beginning the process of restoring people and property to where they belong. You may think: That's quite a task, and you'd be right.

Which brings me to the second thing we learn about God. The stories show us a God with determination.

In the story about the 100 sheep, the shepherd leaves the 99 and looks for the 1. The shepherd is God. Leaving the 99 is taking quite a risk. They are not in a sheep pen but in the open country, the wilderness. God took quite a risk in leaving heaven and being born on earth. Think of the attempts on his life by Herod, the threats from authorities, the lack of a home after his ministry began, the constant dependence on others who often let him down. He wasn't coming to a place of comfort or safety. You might recall the words of the Prologue in John's gospel: "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

Next we read that the shepherd 'goes after the 1 lost sheep until he finds it'. That describes a search which is non-stop, day and night. The woman likewise, 'lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds' her coin. Both are diligent, determined searchers. They make a big effort. And this is the story of God looking for people who are lost. People like you and me. God left the light of heaven and came to the darkness of earth, where there is injustice, abuse of power, sin, evil and suffering. Again as John says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Brothers and sisters, what I am saying is that it was a big sacrifice for God to come and look for us. We know it cost Jesus much more than it cost the shepherd or the woman. It cost him his life. The darkness tried to put out the light, by killing it. That's what the service of Holy Communion is about. In a few minutes, Jonathan will describe God's determination, risk and sacrifice in words which begin "On the night before he died..." God's determination to find people who are lost knows no limit. He wants every one of us restored to his or her family, and to friends, as well as to fellowship with God and God's people. Are you lost in any way? As our second reading said, you can be absolutely sure of this: Christ Jesus came into the world to find lost people. (1 Tim 1:15). He came to find us. He wants us back again. He spares no effort to get us. This is our God.

The third thing we learn about God is his love of celebration when lost people are found. Both the shepherd and the woman have a party. We hear again and again that heaven is like a banquet or a wedding party: everyone is invited to come together and celebrate. Friday night felt like that to me – even though I arrived late, there was joy because we have been re-united with our vicar, and we had fun.

A God of restoration; a God of determination; a God of celebration.

My story didn't end with being lost on any of the three occasions I described. I found my parents, and was able to work with my father and his brothers to continue building a business which I realized was part of my calling from God; my restoration to trust in God has led to much for me, and particularly my appreciation of this community, which I love; and I now realise that the failure of an engagement has enabled me to learn a lot about relationships, and in time to enjoy a marriage to Jo, in ways that I could not have imagined. I was lost. But I was found. It reminds me of another verse in John's prologue: "From the fullness of his grace, we have received blessing upon blessing." Brothers and sisters, if you are lost, God wants to find you too. Find you and bless you and bless you again. For that who God is, according to Jesus' stories. I want you to come to believe that and trust this God for yourselves. If you can't fully believe it yet, then try just a taste. Trust God for one thing only, if you can't trust him for everything. Don't leave here today without grasping this opportunity to let God find you. And don't be worried about baggage you may be carrying. These stories were told by Jesus because the religious people were muttering about people with baggage. They were saying: "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them." Yes he does! Thank goodness. If you are one, come and join the club! We meet with God, who wants us to be restored in every way, and has taken every risk necessary to find us. Come and meet God in communion with us all today.

Amen.

