13th Sunday after Trinity, Askham and Long Marston.

What do you now have two of at home that you actually don’t need two of and only have a duplicate because you couldn’t find the original and couldn’t be bothered to really spend time looking for it? We sadly live in a world where perhaps our time is deemed more important than the cost of a replacement. Going back to my parents, and especially my grandparents time, buying a duplicate would not have even been thought about until the house had been turned upside down and all parties involved had decided that the item was lost forever. What would make you spend the whole of next week looking for it, emptying each room in turn, to try and find what it was you were looking for. A personal heirloom, a phone number, or in my case my actual phone. We sadly still hear the news of the parents of Madaleine McCann hunting for her or her remains, their hunt having gone on for over 22 years.

There will be families looking for lost loved ones in all the wars and conflicts going on in the wars around the world, assuming that their bodies haven’t been recovered. Today in the Gospel reading we hear about a shepherd looking for a lost sheep and a woman looking for a lost coin. The next passage in Luke’s Gospel is that of the prodigal son, not so much a hunt for the lost son, but a story of joy at his return.

The two parables that we have just heard demonstrate an intense effort to regain something highly valued by the owner, but perhaps something that others wouldn’t worry about. A shepherd with a herd of 1000 sheep might not have gone and looked. A woman with millions in the bank might not have looked for one lost coin, we don’t know about the wealth of each of the people involved, because these stories are not about themselves.

The painstaking searches the shepherd and the woman make mirror God’s active compassion for each and every person who runs into trouble.

As I wrote earlier in the week for the wedding talk I gave on Friday, God loves us even if we don’t love him back, and he loves us even though we may have done something wrong, or more likely because we have done something wrong. God seeks out those who have strayed or are lost with determination and a persistence that is beyond our understanding, to restore them to his loving care and into a life of peace and hope.

The joy of finding is highlighted as the crucial point of both of these parables, and the rejoicing can be on your own, as with the shepherd, or within a group of friends and family, as with the woman, but either way the joy is comparable to the joy that God has to those who turn to him, or turn back to him after perhaps wrongdoing. Just like the father of the prodigal son, God does not question why, he just receives us with open arms and an open heart.

On a slight aside I have a problem when people say after a death, that God has taken the deceased to be with him, God never takes us, but always lovingly receives us. God might take us on a journey, but we are asked to follow and walk with him, God never forces our hand to do something, but he is so pleased when we do.

Every Christian and every church should ask themselves whether they genuinely share the divine passion to go out to those who have lost their way, and the divine happiness when the lost come for the first time or return for the umpteenth time. God has a total commitment to us all, willing to carry us every time we falter, and now it is our time to have a total commitment to others. Just like God listens for our call for help, we need to be listening out for the cries of despair and help from those we meet; but that’s where it gets difficult, because usually those cries are difficult to understand and unravel, and sometimes even silent.