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If you have seen the movie “The Lord of the Rings,” you know that the whole premise behind this trilogy is that there is this ring that holds evil powers and needs to be destroyed before its evil master finds it. The ring is bound to its master, and so it is a race against time to see if this little hobbit creature can destroy the ring before the evil master finds it. There is a very interesting line at the beginning of this movie, as this little hobbit begins to finally grasp the enormous task that lies ahead of him. The line comes from a good wizard, who tells the little hobbit, “Always remember, the ring is trying to get back to its master. It *wants* to be found.”

Can a lost thing *want* to be found?

Can a lost animal *want* to be found?

Can a lost person *want* to be found?

What about a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son?

Can the lost want to be found?

These are three of the most well-known images from the New Testament...the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Three stories of three lost things being found. They were lost and then were found.

Usually, we are inclined to divide up the world into two categories—the lost and the found. The only place where the two seemingly come together is in those card tables in the corners of schools everywhere...the “Lost and Found” tables, where strange things appear, like a single sock, a swim suit in the middle of winter, or a metal Superman lunch box from the 1980’s. Other than that, we separate things—mostly people—into two clean categories...the lost *or* the found. The saints *or* the sinners. One or the other, but you can’t be both.

But maybe...just *MAYBE*...it's not a case of either/or. Maybe...just *MAYBE*, people can be both lost *and* found....all at the same time. Saint and sinner...all at the same time. Sounds pretty Lutheran, doesn't it? Because it is.

Think of yourselves, I'll think of myself. When was the last time you or I thought, "I am totally and completely lost." I'm talking spiritually here not geographically, which happens to me all the time, even in Calamus...no, I'm talking about being absolutely and totally abandoned by God...absolutely and totally lost, with not a shred of hope of ever being found again...every once in a while people have these times, and these are terrifying, suicidal times, but if you're here today then you didn't pull the trigger on those moments, and so there must have been some sort of inner conflict within you, some sort of spiritual wrestling, a tiny glimmer of

hope...a faint stirring of the soul...the yearning of that ring that wants to be found.

So, then, we are that sheep that is lost...that wooly, stinky, stubborn sheep that forces the shepherd to leave the 99 obedient sheep behind in order to save its neck...we are that sheep that is lost and found.

We are that coin...that tiny piece of iron stamped with the grinning face of Caesar, grimy with the oil of a thousand greedy hands...but still of enough value and worth that the house is turned upside down until it is found...we are that coin that is lost and found.

We are that son...that bull-headed, arrogant son who tears out of the house, slamming the door behind us, pockets full of our father's cash...coming home stinking of pigs and the cheap smell of the prostitute's perfume...but still beloved enough that the father races out of the house when he sees his son returning and throws his arms around his neck and

treats him like royalty instead of scum...we are that son that is lost and found.

We are the sheep, the coin and the child that want to be found by its master. We are created in our Master's very image, sharing humanity with its very own Son. And yet we don't need to be convinced that we are lost...We know we are lost...we know we despair when we should rejoice...we know we doubt when we should trust...we know we babble when we should listen...we know we destroy when we should create...we know we judge when we should forgive. We know we are sinners, but we want to be saints....saintly sinners.

But we also know we try our best to be followers of Christ. We try to make good decisions in our lives...we try to speak kindly to others...we try to raise our children loving God...we try to protect and love our neighbors...we try to be compassionate and trusting and patient...we try to

reach out to others, stand up for others, sacrifice for the sake of others...We know we are baptized and that God claims us as his own...We know are saints, but we can't help but sin...sinful saints.

We belong on a card table in any office in any school in the country. Not Lost or Found...but Lost *and* Found...all at the same time. In our lives, we keep getting lost, over and over again. Like the sheep, we wander into the wilderness and discover we don't know how to get back to safety. Like the coin, we get stuck between the cushions of the couch where all kinds of other disgusting things get lost and lodged, and we don't know how to get un-stuck. Like the son, we think we know better than anybody else, especially God, when it comes to *what's best for me*, and so we stomp off in a self-righteous tantrum, but when our steam runs out we are ashamed to go back home.

We are lost and found. Saint and sinner. Not either/or, but both.

Beloved by God, who will never, ever stop looking for you, in your forever

lostness, because God's desire is for you to be forever found.