

September 11, Ordinary 24C (Luke 15:1-10)

Sometimes in ministry you lose precious things.

by [Charisse R. Tucker](#) in the [September 2022](#) issue

“Find your way back, don’t let this life drive you crazy,” sings Beyoncé. “Find your way back, come back home ’fore the street lights on.”

There’s nothing like the confusion you experience when you find yourself lost in a familiar place. It takes a minute for your mind to embrace the realization, and sometimes it takes your ego even longer. You don’t know where you are—but there were enough markers along the way that seemed so familiar that by the time the truth arrives to set you free you’ve been lost longer than you care to admit. In these moments it’s best to take a deep breath, pull over to a safe place, and get some directions to guide you to your proper destination.

In this week’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells a story about the reclamation of lost things and the celebration that happens when that which was lost makes it to its proper destination. A wandering sheep and a devoted shepherd. A lost coin and a determined woman. In both stories Jesus points out to his detractors among the religious leaders that there is value in seeking out and returning precious things once lost—and due cause for public celebration once lost things have been found. If this is true for sheep and coins, then how much more warranted is the rejoicing for sinners who turn from their errant path and make their way back home to God?

The people Jesus is talking to are presented with an opportunity to find themselves in the story. We have the same opportunity as we draw near to these ancient texts in the midst of the hum and fury of our contemporary lives. We can cast ourselves as the compassionate shepherd, willing to brave the elements in search of the sheep that has gone astray. We can see ourselves as the woman willing to expend all energy and search every corner of the house just to recover one lost coin. Who doesn’t want to see themselves as the hero who finds what is lost?

But Jesus also offers his listeners the opportunity to see ourselves as the sheep or the coin, as that which has been lost in familiar settings. Instead of craggy rock or

crevices in cushions that obscure the way home, it might be certainty of conviction and rightness, the inability to be guided by new understanding when it is revealed.

We do not know if any of Jesus' original hearers gets the message. The text doesn't tell us. But Jesus gives them that safe moment on the side of the road that makes it possible to get their bearings.

Nor does the text say how those seen as sinners react when they hear Jesus defend them. I imagine their hearts swell with courage and confidence in their decision to trust Jesus as compass, guide, and destination. Public affirmation and support provide sustenance as new believers grow in their understanding and trust in God.

As for the disciples, I imagine that this moment is a mixed blessing. They may see it as a clear template for maintaining focus and composure amid criticism. Later they will all be tested and will need to work through external critique and internal doubt with clarity and attention. But some of them might also recognize that sometimes, while engaged in the work of ministry, you lose precious things. There are moments when we look up and are no longer clear about where we are or what we are doing. Difficulty can be disorienting. It can make you lose your way and your stuff. Misplaced joy. Lost faith. Hidden confidence.

The path of discipleship does not shield us from these realities, but the witness of scripture is that wherever we find ourselves in the story, Jesus provides instruction and direction for us to find our way back. The good news is that whether we should have known better or not, there's always a celebration welcoming our return home.