

Today we begin a new message series “Gifted by Grace” and today’s theme is “Lost and Found”.

Have you ever lost something?

Your keys?

Your homework?

Your confidence?

Have you ever been lost?

As a young child, I got lost in a large department store.

I had been looking at all the toys displayed in December and didn’t notice that I was no longer at my mother’s side.

When I realized that I could not see her, I became frantic and started going down various aisles looking for her.

Where had she gone? Why had she gotten herself lost?

I was frightened that we would be separated forever.

I was found by a store clerk, who called my mother over the loudspeaker so that she would know where to find me.

What joy I felt when I saw her and she gathered me into her arms.

My lost mommy and I were together again.

This is a different kind of lostness than keys or homework.

Both my mother and I knew where we were – I was in the toy department, and she was looking at housewares, as it happened.

But we were lost to each other.

The lostness was in the relationship.

...

When Jesus says that he comes to seek and save the lost, he is speaking about those whose relationship with God is disconnected.

When Moses was up on Mt. Sinai receiving the covenant of the Law from God,

the people down below became disconnected from him and from God.

They began to worship a golden calf, made from their own jewelry.

They were dazzled by the splendor of the idol and were lost to the love of God for them.

They had traded faith in the living God for faith in a lifeless idol of their own making.

They had turned their backs on God and become disconnected from the One who had chosen them,

promised them a future and

was already leading them into that future.

They were like that little girl who walked away from her mommy in the toy department.

But the Hebrews did not recognize their lostness.

They were having fun.

They were having the time of their lives, dancing around the golden calf and feasting before it.

They were playing with their toys.

And they were lost.

**Sometimes, people are lost and don't realize it.**

Even believers can get so caught up in the things of this world,  
the pleasures and demands of life,  
that we scarcely give a thought to God.

It is so easy to neglect to pray,  
to let our Bibles gather dust,  
and to seek wisdom everywhere but from God.

And those who do not know the Lord at all are lost in the darkness.

**Eternal life comes only in relationship to God.**

The lost cannot experience it.

They seek their life elsewhere and discover too late that it is a dead end.

**Our dear Lord did not create us for death, but for life.**

It is our sin that kills us.

Sin that disconnects us from our Creator and redeemer.

**But in love, God provides a way back to him.**

Like the store clerk in the department store,

God provides people who reconnect the lost to him.

- Moses interceded on behalf of the Hebrew people,
  - seeking to reconnect them with the God of life and salvation.
- The prophets proclaimed God's truth to call the people away from sin and back to God.
- And then Jesus came for the purpose of seeking out the lost to reconnect them, to bring them back into relationship with God.

He tells the stories of the shepherd seeking out the lost sheep

and the woman seeking the lost coin

to demonstrate the lengths to which God goes

to be in relationship with those he loves.

**Jesus never gives up – going all the way to the cross so that trusting in him, we might see the way back to God.**

That way is not a matter of our achievement,

**but of Jesus' mercy and forgiveness.**

He seeks us in our lostness to call us back into relationship with him.

He seeks the lost through his word and through those who speak God's Word to us.

He seeks us through the community of faith that embodies his love and mercy.

He seeks the lost by shining a light on the deceit of idolatry

so that the blind might see their error and turn to him for life.

**Jesus is actively seeking that one lost sheep so that all might have abundant life.**

And Oh the joy when we are found!

Not only our joy, but God's joy over a single sinner who turns away from sin and comes back into relationship with the Lord.

We know the relief when we find our lost keys, and the joy of being reconciled with someone who had broken our heart.

Imagine that joy multiplied a thousand times – and even that cannot compare with the joy of the Lord when we turn back to him.

This is the amazing grace of God in Jesus

**– that He is the way out of the dead end of our sins and into the life of God.**

As St. Paul puts it:

*I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

This is good news worth sharing!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen