

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

Psalm 14

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10

Which one do you hate more, losing something or getting lost? Lately, I have been losing track of more and more in my own life, and I realized as life gets more and more complicated, it's getting harder for me to know where things are. So the other day, I had to take an emergency trip and I hadn't planned on it, so the night before the trip I went into the closet to go get my travel handbag and I couldn't find it. I was looking frantically. It wasn't where I was supposed to have it. And I thought what did I do with it?

And I thought, well, maybe my last travels I didn't put it back, so I looked in all of these other odd places where it shouldn't have been and it wasn't there. And then I was thinking, did I put it in the donation bin? Why would I do that because I really like that bag. But maybe I have these other bags and maybe I decided at some point, which I had forgotten at that point that I didn't need the bag anymore, and so off it went to the donation bin. And what if somebody else has my bag and now I really need it? Because if I don't have my bag, I don't know where things are and then I don't know that like my driver's license is here, my keys are here and then quart-sized bag with all the toiletries are just kept here, and I was just panicked. And I was like, "Where is this stupid bag?"

So then I thought, "Oh, my son Miles must have done something with it." My 15-year-old son, right, because that's what a 15-year-old boy would do. So I went to him and I said, "Where's my bag?" And he's like, "I don't know." So I was frantic and I ended up not finding my bag. So I went to the airport with a different bag. And I was extremely nervous and I thought the TSA people are just going to pull me over. They're like, "Something's wrong with her." And so I indeed made it through the TSA but I forgot stuff because the bag had the pockets to put all the things in and I wasn't used to it. And I just wanted to know what happened to that stupid bag.

But even more, I try really hard not to get lost. Because I'm one of those people who actually can't tell east from west, left from right. And so, I need lots of help. I need my GPS. I need maps. I need to have things figured out way ahead of time. I'm that person that is so grateful that when I come over to your house, you say to me, "And then, you're going to turn left and at the corner is the mom and pop shop, and it's got a red awning on top." I'm like, "Thank you."

I remember before cell phones, we used to use maps. You remember that? And then we would use these maps. My husband and I would go traveling and he would drive and I was the navigator. And so, I'd always be prepared. I'd always know where we're going, unless we had a trip that I'd forgotten to prepare for or we were going somewhere that wasn't planned and then we'd be on our own. And inevitably, we'd get lost and I'd be frantic. I'm like, "I have no idea where we were." And my husband who has a worse sense of direction than I do had a way better way of dealing with it. He's like, "Manisha, it's an adventure."

On May 8, 2019, yoga teacher, Amanda Eller, who lived in Hawaii decided to take a quick hike on a Forest Preserve in Maui. She was familiar with the trail. She had used it many

times before. And therefore, felt comfortable leaving in her car, her water, her wallet and her cell phone. She got lost. She got turned around and she didn't know which way to go. And it did not go well for her.

Three days in, she lost her footing from a 20-foot cliff and fell, and broke her leg and tore her meniscus. And the next day, there was a flash flood that came her way and she lost her shoes. The authorities began to search for her but they were unsuccessful. So on May 12th, they ceased the search and rescue as mandated by the 72-hour limit on these expensive operations. But volunteers continued to look for her. There were sometimes up to 150 people who had gathered together and received dangerous tasks in an attempt to find her.

According to New York Times, they rappelled in the ravines, searched caves, free-dove into pools and navigated fast moving streams looking for Ms. Eller. Others killed aggressive wild boars and checked their intestines for human remains. On Friday, May 24th, members of the volunteers search party spotted her. She was alive. She was lost but she had been found. The volunteers rejoiced and they were elated, and everybody celebrated for one day. Because then the word came in another valley in Maui, another person, Noah Mina, was missing for almost a week. He had gone to the valley in order to find himself. So, with the same zeal, the volunteers went looking for Noah hopeful. It took them only four days. But this time, they found Noah's body.

Both of these search and rescue stories were presented together by Pastor Melissa Earley in a Christian Century article and she titled it, "Not Everything That's Lost Can be Found." And her point was that sometimes what is lost is lost, not all things work out. And I think this is the reason that being lost is terrifying. Will someone find you? What if they give up? What if you will never be found? And of course, being lost is not just a physical experience. You may know exactly where you are and still not know where you're going. According to Pastor Earley, the best thing you can do sometimes when things are lost is to give yourself grace to give up the search, or perhaps be okay that you're lost. How okay are you with losing something or not knowing where you are?

I was talking to a person the other day who had been going through many ups and downs and not really sure where she was going to go next. And I asked her how she managed actually to seem so peaceful and be comfortable when her life was so disorienting. And she said, "I'm learning that it's a mistake to think that we are either lost or found." In fact, we're constantly losing ourselves and finding ourselves. We are always in the midst of being lost and being found. It's not an "either, or", it's a "both, and." And we naturally oscillate between the extremes and that's where we should be comfortable.

And I think this is a beautiful way to live. Not to be difficult on yourself or others because you're feeling lost or not feeling good about yourself, but always realizing that this dance we do of knowing and not knowing, of feeling secure and being disoriented, this is our way of life with God. And there's nothing to be ashamed of. There's nothing wrong with you. And you are just like every other sheep or coin that loses its way and needs to be found. You wander, you go off course, you get stuck in that dusty corner, and you need a light, you need to be found, you return and then you do it again.

What's interesting about the parables that Jesus tells is all the work is not being done by the

sheep or the coin. All the work is being done by the shepherd and the woman. It's the shepherd and the woman who are driven to distraction to find what is missing in their lives. God is driven to distraction to find us even and especially when we're deeply lost or losing ourselves.

The other day I was in my coat closet cleaning. Guess what I found? There it was. Oh, my God, I was so excited. I pulled out the bag. I ran to my 15-year-old son. I was like, "Look!" And he was like, "Great." So I went to my husband, I was like, "I found it. I found it." He's like, "Yay!" And I called my sister. I was like, "I found it!" Because everybody knew the story at this point. I called my colleagues. I was like, "I found it." And I was so happy. This bag had become an immense treasure to me and I was the one who lost it. Isn't that amazing? God loses us in the first place, and God rejoices when we are found again, and again and again.

Yesterday, last night, at the 5:00 PM service, we baptized two adorable little girls. They must've been about five months old. They were so cute. Celia and Yona. And I remember thinking about baptism and this conversation I had had with a mom of a teenage boy who was not coming to church, not really participating, was trying to figure out his life, was a little lost, and I was his youth minister. I sat down with the mother and I said, "How are you doing?" And she said, "Oh, I'm fine." Because I was there at his baptism. And he didn't see what I saw. But I saw when he was baptized, God attached a little bungee cord to my kid at the back so he can run as far as he wants to because one day God will go –

And I thought, baptism also gives us another promise, another promise from God. God says to you and to me, "I will go anywhere and look everywhere for you, and I will never stop until I find you again and again and again." We may be lost but we will always be found. Amen.

[End of Recording]