



ST GEORGE'S

## **LUKE 15:1-7**

What did you save up for, for ages when you were a child? Or what are you saving up for now? Go.

When I was a kid, the Argos catalogue was king – way before Amazon ruined us all – the argos catalogue was there. I knew it back to front. Toys at the back, tech and computer stuff just before. Boring homeware for miles in the middle. And it would come with four ready made little cards. You had to find the code – use a tiny pencil and then you can fill it in.

Now as a kid, I was highly concerned because four cards meant you only had four chances to buy from Argos – I didn't understand it – but Argos know best – so you had to choose what you really really really wanted. What you really desired. The will of a child for a toy is strong. You want it.

St Georges, more than even the desires of a child for toys and gadgets - God wants you. God desires you. You are his child, his joy and prize. God wants you. If I asked you the gospel, you might tell me about the cross, the resurrection, the faithfulness of God to Israel and yet the basic good news of Christianity is amazingly simple God actually wants to be with you. Dwell on that for a moment.

In the gospel here – it starts with people – religious people and educated ones - sneering – why Jesus are you hanging out with them – it's quite high school – the question is underneath – why do you want them they're not worth it – they don't deserve it. You should be with us. The bible has a lot to say about sneering – when it talks about 'haughty eyes' or 'proud hearts'. I remember from school, looking down at my daps, and somehow I hadn't got the message about buying Nike or Adidas trainers and I knew people were looking down on me for the shoes on my feet. I hadn't done anything wrong – I just didn't fit in. The example can change – it might be your phone that's not right – or the way you speak or the colour of your skin – but it's that look – you don't belong. Sneer.

Now sometimes we think the right response is pity. Feel bad for them and so go and spend time and do something nice with them. Because, you know...who else will. Obligation and guilt that can be relieved by doing something to make us feel better. Sometimes, we can project this onto God too. That God looked down on humanity, all grubby, a bit sad and said. Alright....if I have to. Some traditions like to say, you only know the good news is you know how bad the bad news is.

Nope.

Nada.

Proper good news.

God desires you. Wants you.

'Which one of you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices'

More God actually seeks you out. In Jesus, God comes to us, God actually seeks us out. The question of whether we 'deserve it' is bonkers. Who could deserve such a thing? Were all of nature mine – that is an offering far too small – God wants you, calls you back to himself. In the act of creation, God creates out of sheer joy and love. He doesn't need to create, he isn't added to by creating anything at all, complete within his own triune identity and being. God creates out of sheer joy and calls us to share in that joy. Calls us to welcome other people into it. A joy which surpasses understanding. I've told my conversion story many times – but the sense that I knew something different was going on was the abundant joy I felt in serving and cleaning the streets of rubbish. Joy! Because it's fun to chip up chewing gum? Nope. Is it fun to pick up broken glass and litter? Nope. It was a joy to serve God in that place, to welcome others into his praise. Hallelujah.

This short parable is one of three in which the images are repeated. The lost sheep that is found. The lost coin uncovered by the poor woman. The Father whose own prodigal son walks away from the family. The themes are the same – Loss and Joy of recovery.

Sheep don't mean to get lost. They're stupid creatures – but they nibble their way to freedom. That's a juicy bit of hedge. Munch munch munch. It only happens bit by bit. When suddenly you turn around and oh I don't recognise this field. It's a bit like if you've ever gone surfing. You start at one point of the beach and then oh....I have moved and I didn't even see. I didn't know I was lost. Likewise with a coin. Open the wallet up and it rolls away. Estimates are that there are 350 million pounds in spare change lying in sofas, under rugs and inside the lining of your coat. Sometimes people get lost and they don't know – its not conscious. Just a bit lost.

Peter was telling me about a couple we haven't seen for a while and they said – church is just not my priority anymore – we want to go shopping and spend time with family or doing sudoku. Other things have crowded in. Which brings us to that little word at the end about repentance. The right phrase is 'turning back towards God'; making the main thing the main thing. Seeing rightly and getting our priorities in order. God, family, work, friends. Repentance is a sign of righteousness – not sin – we all need to be turning ourselves back to God.

The parable clearly pictures God as the good shepherd searching for his flock. But there is an implication too of care for those are lost. Christians are sheep – who've been welcomed into, sought out by the Lord and brought into a safe space. But are to be shepherds as well as sheep. Forgive us Lord, when we've guarded the doors and sneered, instead we are to go out – to welcome in. This is always the case with those outside the existing community – welcoming them in.

But in our minds are the displaced people of Ukraine. Lost not out of choice, or temptation but because wolves have invaded their field and scattered them.

They'll need homes, doctors appointments, dentists, kids will need schooling. But they'll also need a welcome which in the last few years, Britain has not been known for, with the Syrians and Afghani refugees have not really experienced. I am not expert on these things but St Georges, we can resolve to be a people of welcome, a people of grace and love, a people and place where lost things can be found again.

Not because we have to, not because we're paid to but because we want to, we desire to have the lost be found once again.