

**Proper 19, Year C**  
**September 12, 2010**

Are you the type of person who loses things all the time, or the type of person who says that there is a place for everything and therefore everything is usually in it's place?

I have spent most of my life in the second category. I tend to put things in pre-determined places so that I'll know where they are when I need them.

However, now that I live with two children under the age of 4, I must regrettably admit that my once organized little world now feels more like the swirling chaos of a cyclone.

Toddlers put things in the darnedest places, and I have found credit cards in warmer drawers, keys in the trash, and I can't begin to tell you all the things I have pulled out from under the couch and in between the cushions.

And if Elsa has misplaced something she wants (and you know that 3 year olds only want things immediately) then she will have me searching through the house with the passion and intensity of the woman in today's gospel lesson, except I'm more likely to be looking for a hair band of a particular color than a silver coin!

In my various daily searches, I am mindful of a prayer my mother taught me in my Catholic childhood; a prayer that I use more now than I ever did then: "Oh St. Anthony please come around; something's lost and can't be found."

It's not hard to see why this gospel lesson gets us thinking about how we lose and find things. It's one of those universal human experiences to which we can all relate. But with that said, I also need to tell you that this gospel lesson is about something far more profound than lost hair bands; this gospel is about God's relentless search for you and me.

It is one thing to get frustrated when we misplace something, but it is far more important to realize that, at certain times in our lives, we lose ourselves, we forget who we are, or more to the point, we forget whose we are and God loses us and is then the one searching for us.

Do you know that you are the beloved of God? Do we know that we are the beloved of God? We, the people of Christ Church, Ithan, are the desired souls for whom God is searching. It's one of those truths that we know intellectually, but I also know that many of you don't quite believe it.

Why? Because we are acutely aware of some falsehood that gets in the way. For some of us the falsehood is that we are really on our own down here so we have to struggle and do the best we can (Functional Atheists). For some of us the falsehood is that God is like some hardnosed disciplinarian who is watching our every move with suspicion (Guilt Gospel). For some of us the falsehood is that we simply don't deserve to be loved.

In other words, we humans have an incredible capacity for getting ourselves lost in a vast number of ways.

Today is the kick off Sunday for a new ministry year here at Christ Church. The Choir is back, Sunday school begins again, and we have several new ministries that are taking off this month.

This is a great day for a gospel like this one because, at it's best, the church is a place where people can find themselves again in Christ. A place where you and I can be reminded that we are the beloved of God, and brothers and sisters in Christ, and that while we may struggle in life, as a Christian Community we never struggle alone. We have the presence of God and are surrounded by our friends in Christ.

So welcome to a new ministry year at Christ Church. Earlier I shared a prayer from my childhood about finding things; I'd like to close now with a more profound prayer from Thomas Merton about how we get lost and how God finds us:

My Lord, God.  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me  
nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you  
does In fact please you.

And I hope that I will never do anything  
apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this,  
you will lead me by the right road  
though I may know nothing about it. \

Therefore will I trust you always, though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me.  
and you will never leave me  
to face my struggles alone. Amen