

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall  
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*Rejoice with me*

I wonder who you most identify with in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin.

Are you the one who searches or are you one who feels lost?

We can probably identify with both:

We are often the one searching for that document or item you need to find but can't and then the relief and joy when you find it!

There has been much rejoicing in our household when a certain birth certificate that had been mislaid was found by a certain domestic chaplain – a happy dance was had.

We can also be the lost sheep or coin. We can feel lost, lost because of illness or grief, lost because of change or a situation we are facing in life or just feel lost in yourself.

Jesus tells these stories to those who have gathered to hear him and the grumbling pharisees who question the company he keeps.

Hospitality and table fellowship were a big thing in Jesus' day. They were symbols of togetherness and community. Food was precious and larger community meals were serious affairs where it did matter who you ate with.

By eating with sinners and tax collectors Jesus is showing who he cares about who he accepts – that his focus is on people and valuing them, all of them, not just some of them.

The shepherd values the lost sheep as does the woman who loses one coin.

Which one of you would not leave 99 sheep and go in search of the lost one? Jesus asks the pharisees.

Many might think that preserving the 99 would be the best place to put your energies.

But even if we might not go in search God does.

God is the one who searches for the lost one and like the shepherd lays it on his shoulders.

This is such a poignant image of the shepherd who lays the lost tired sheep on his shoulders and brings it home and says Rejoice with me.

The energy is all in the searching and finding.

God is like the shepherd who searches, finds and rejoices.

God is like the woman who searches diligently and finds the lost coin and rejoices.

God delights in the finding the lost one, in seeking us where we are lost.

Each lost one is valued and searched for and found and rejoiced over.

It is an unconditional love of finding the lost one.

There is no judgement about how it got lost.

The focus is on being found.

God rejoices over finding what is lost, just as God rejoices with us when we seek what is lost to restore it.

God values all people and all creation.

As the women's statement to a WWC conference said: The whole creation is beloved by God. Like the woman who swept and cleaned her house in search of the lost coin, we affirm that God cares for even the last detail of this, God's household into which we are placed.

I wonder what it is that we think is of value to search for and care for?

I wonder how we value God's creation around us and the habitat and creatures that are at risk of being lost.

I wonder where we feel lost and what it feels like when we are found and rejoiced over.

I wonder what it says to us today as we ponder what it means that QE II has died and we ponder what we have lost and found in her.

When I think of the Queen I think of the girl who never expected to be queen but committed herself to the service of others as part of her response to God's love of her.

She was a woman of deep faith.

She was a woman who could communicate that faith simply in her Christmas messages, giving hope and pointing to the difference that human beings can make in building up communities.

She also was able to learn from her mistakes and value the gifts of others around her.

No matter what we think of the monarchy and its complex role in Australia we can give thanks for a woman who dedicated herself to a life of service to others.

We can value the way she lived her life faithfully and think about how we can do the same in the way we live our lives.

She is now laid on the shoulders of the shepherd who leads her home.

God goes in search of each of us and finds us where we are lost, whether we are the Queen or someone who is very ordinary and vulnerable.

Rumi said 'What you seek is seeking you.' This is what grace is, the God who seeks us and finds us and lays us on God's shoulders and brings us home. The God who keeps sweeping the house and searches every corner with such care.

This is the God we see in Jesus. This is who we are to model in our own lives.

Into your hands, O merciful Saviour, we commend your servant *N*.  
Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of  
your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him/her into the  
arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the  
glorious company of the saints in light. Amen.