

In both the reading from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospel today, we hear about the call of Samuel and disciples of Jesus. It's as if God is seeking people out. There's a lot of "finding" in John's odd account of the calling of Jesus' disciples. Jesus finds Philip...Philip finds Nathaniel... Philip then tells Nathaniel that they have found Jesus...And then Nathaniel finds that Jesus knows a lot more about him than he'd imagined.

This has all gotten me to thinking that one of the best feelings in the world is when you are found. Do you know what I mean? Maybe it's the delight of the child playing hide and seek who, though having put some thought and effort into a hiding place, is nevertheless so very happy to be found. Barbara tells of playing in her grandparents' home where she hid in a laundry shoot! Or maybe it's that time you were out for a hike and got lost and had absolutely no idea where you were, not even what direction you were going in, wondered how in the world you'd make it back to the main trail, and then you saw a trail marker. Or maybe it's not a geographical lost-ness, but an emotional sense of being out of place. A young adult lost to addiction who finds help, a friend lost to depression who finds a measure of solace in a new relationship, a parent lost to dementia who still lights up when you hit upon particular memories that are tucked deep inside. Yes, there are few things that feel better than being found when you are lost.

Except, perhaps, when you are the one who finds someone who is lost.... even, if they didn't know they were lost in the first place.

My in-laws use to go to Sarasota, Florida every year for a few months of the winter. Our son, Caleb, was maybe three or four years of age. One the activities was to visit Jungle Gardens. Walking paths wind through, well...a jungle of tropical plants and trees. You can feed flamingos and visit monkeys and have your picture taken while holding a colorful macaw. And of course there are alligators, too—it's Florida after all! The highlight is an entertaining show of performing parrots and cockatoos that is repeated throughout the day. I can still hear the applause and squeals of delight as a cockatoo peddled a tiny bicycle across a high wire.

Caleb was fascinated by all of it and content to take in the sights and sounds. We tarried by the Koi pond and made our way to the alligator exhibit. I was holding his hand and then I wasn't, for just a moment. When I looked down to retrieve his hand he was gone. I did a quick 360 to scan the surrounding area, peeking in between various people to see where he might have gone, but he was nowhere to be found. A little more frantically, I widened my search. Still, nothing. Panic coursed through me as all those thoughts and questions surged through my mind: Maybe...? What if..? I began to call his name. No response. I told Barbara to stay put and I went to security. They set into motion a search that turned up Caleb in what felt like hours but was probably less than five minutes. He'd wandered to an attraction not that far away, worming his little body to the front of a group of other people waiting in line. When I scooped him up into my arms, I realized immediately that he'd been blissfully watching... I can't even remember what. He certainly didn't feel lost and had no idea what all the fuss was about. That feeling – of finding my son who had been lost – was about the best feeling I'd experienced. Of relief, of love, of wholeness, of confidence that the world was a good and safe place.

There is, right now, a lot of lost-ness in our country and world. And perhaps good reason for that: regional conflicts in Yemen, Palestine, and Ukraine that threaten to spread into wider

conflict. There is rampant injustice, intense division, and a readiness to resort to violence. There is blurring of truth, misinformation, and a disregard not just for facts but verifiable reality. Yes, there is lots of lost-ness. And, truthfully, I find it frustrating, even maddening. Yet this Gospel passage also reminds me that God seems to have a heart for the lost, for the irresponsible, self-absorbed, and reckless younger-siblings and the rule-following, rigid, and self-righteous older ones alike. Which includes people I get mad at, and people who get mad at me, and it even includes me when I am lost, whether I know it or not.

I'm grateful that one of the promises tucked into this Gospel passage is that God keeps seeking us – *all of us* – whether we know we're lost or not, or even whether we think we're looking for God or not. God seeks the lost, continually looking, searching, finding, and always inviting, "Come and see!"

In these turbulent times, we can share the good news of the God who will not give up, who lays aside glory to take on our lot and life, who journeys even to the cross to show us how far God will go to seek out the lost and tell us we are loved. This is such a season to "Come and see."

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