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Lost and Found

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Lost and Found

I do not like losing something – a key to the house, my wallet, or a message with all the directions for attending and participating in a meeting. What a relief, if I find it. I am not so scripturally oriented that I literally call my neighbors together and ask them to rejoice with me over the item that was found. But I can easily identify with the pleasure people take in finding what was lost.

Remembering an experience of what was lost and then found provides a means of appreciating what it like to find a person who has been lost, or to become more aware of who we are in some of our own incidences of having been lost, and then found. Recall the words of the old Quaker hymn: "I once was lost, but now I'm found." Or the Scripture story about the father who welcomed back a wayward son who "was lost, but has been found." Finding and being found are experiences that have about them some fine decorations of joy, not the rough dirt of regrets.

Many institutions, businesses, and public areas have a lost and found unit. These are primarily for the sake of helping restore material possessions to their owners, though many of us have heard an occasional announcement at a sporting event: "Will the parents of a lost child please come to the red courtesy phone." When we adults recognize or acknowledge that we "feel lost," or describe others as being lost, we are not thinking about possessions or property, but the unpleasant experience of being somehow separated from "home," and not knowing the way back.

When we are lost as to the direction of our lives, we might not be frightened or even aware of our situation at first. Perhaps we have experienced a period of having little or no purpose to support even our routine daily activities. For some, a literal loss of a job or a loved one, or involvement in some terrible experience such as a personal injury or severe emotional setback can precipitate a sense of no longer being safe at home in one's heart and soul. Being lost and in need of either being found, or of "finding ones' self" is a serious condition, often more painful than being geographically lost.

When we become aware that we or someone we know is lost for lack of a motive to engage even the ordinary challenges of life, we do not need a Global Positioning System to tell us where we are located on the earth, but we need a light in our hearts that enables us to

recognize who we are as beloved children of God. Being found is the revelation to us of the positive meaning and purpose of our existence.

Many of us are “found” by caring for others. We become aware that the burden is lifted, the darkness illuminated, and that we are “at home,” even in the midst of stress and strain. Location is not the issue; loving is. We become deeply satisfied when we recognize that we are engaged in the exercise of our gifts in service to others. For many of us, we recover our purpose in life when we begin to do what we know is right for us, no matter how disoriented we might feel. As teachers, we make a positive difference for our students; as parents, we carry on the most important vocation in human society; as listeners or visitors, we enliven those who feel that they are alone; as donors, we contribute time, energy, and finances that allow others to experience more fully their dignity as persons. We were lost, but now we are found – by doing that for which we are fully equipped by God our creator and lover.

If we have ever been gladdened by recovering a sense of self that we had lost, imagine how God feels when we, his beloved, are found. God rejoices when we come back to our “home.” And what is our experience when we reflect on God’s pleasure at our being found? Have we ever been touched when singing or hearing the words, “I once was lost and now am found?” Our hearts resonate with words indicating our value in God’s eyes, and in the recognition – however intuitive and inarticulate – of our importance in the lives of others.

If we are not in the habit of calling together our friends to rejoice with us when we find a lost object, we might also be shy to tell others of our personal experiences. But we know, and do rejoice, that we who have at times been lost, have been found. Thank you, dear God.