

THE FOURTH WEEK IN LENT

everything [in] between lost & found



The Good Shepherd

*Jesus said, "Who among you wouldn't leave the 99?
Who among you wouldn't look for the one?"*

Someone in the crowd probably rolled their eyes.
Someone squirmed and looked at their palms.
Someone sighed and thought to themselves,
*"This man doesn't understand the business.
What fool would leave 99 to look for one?"*

But maybe God was not talking about us.
Maybe God was talking about
her own reckless love.
Maybe God was talking about
her own willingness
to turn the world upside down
for me.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

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Read Luke 15:1-7

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

Maybe none are found until all are found

"I've found my voice!" The class beamed with excitement, sharing in palpable joy. This student had been quiet for years, almost never speaking. One day, they spoke, then again, building steam throughout the semester, deepening their vocal participation and contributing mightily to collective learning.

"How did I not know about this?" asked another student in a different class. They had been studying for years and had already devoted countless hours to various ministries. "Now that I found this out, I am free! And I am also mad!" That class joined in palpable joy and righteous anger.

How did these students find their voice and freedom? Both exclaimed that the assigned reading invited them in, showing that their voices were welcome, their freedom was at hand, and that people who look like them have been calling them through generations to find their voice and freely join the conversation.

For a teacher, bearing witness to a student who finds their voice is joyous. With newfound courage, freer students glow. What they did or didn't realize was lost is now found! The whole room shifts when a voice found adds something to the group that was lost without them. When a found voice claims its rightful power, there is almost always rejoicing.

But it's also maddening. Voices aren't disembodied utterings, but embodied precious people worthy of being heard. Bearing witness to the joy of found voices also bears witness to obliviousness that voices were missing. Even with deep conviction and contrition, it's painful when the almost-always-heard realize they never noticed anyone missing in readings, historical genealogies, or learning environments.

I assign readings from often-invisibilized theologians who honor their mentors, one generation to the next across multiple generations. These readings also clearly describe the finding of the authors' own unique and powerful voices.

Tracing generations of Asian Feminist, Womanist, Liberationist scholars in theological trajectories teaches about the kind of mentoring it takes to help scholars find their voices. Readings themselves become mentors to many students, including the two mentioned here. While diverse representation in readings is just a start, it's not enough. I seek to read what has existed for generations, but has been left out, lost, unread, unpreached, unassigned, unknown. Who noticed? Who searched?

One commentator suggests calling this the parable of the found instead of the lost sheep because this search continues until the final finding. It doesn't stop, doesn't tire of noticing the missing. Have you found your voice? Have you found your freedom? Have you found your anger? Have you found your joy?

Reflect

Whose voices have you not yet noticed? Which ones are missing, unread, unpreached, unheard?



THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
everything [in] between **lost & found**



Lost & Found

by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Inspired by Luke 15:1-7

Newspaper & gold leaf collage with digital drawing

I began my artwork for this series by collaging torn strips of newspaper articles together, overlapping global headlines with photos of current events. Along the torn edges, I added gold leaf. Then I photographed the result, editing the photos in black and white. These photos would become the backdrop for my pieces, as I wanted my digital drawings to emerge within the noise of the world's deepest pains, divisions, and everything in between. The collage is also a reference to theologian Karl Barth's famous quote about reading the bible and the newspaper together.⁷ I wanted the gold leaf to represent God's presence in the spaces in between the events and forces that tear us apart.

On September 27th, 2024, I began drawing the Good Shepherd with the lost sheep tenderly wrapped around his shoulders. As I worked, rain pummeled our roof, saturating the ground with an endless deluge as the wide bands of tropical storm Helene⁸ reached our high-elevation town of Black Mountain, NC. The next day, winds roared and threw trees to the ground like dominos. We lost power, then water, then cell service. We didn't know it yet, but every creek and river had swelled with enormous force, sweeping away everything in their path. Landslides, sinkholes, and extreme flooding ravaged the entire region of Western North Carolina, taking homes, towns, and human lives.

We were incredibly and graciously spared, having no flooding in our house or trees on our roof, so as soon as the storm relented, we headed out to find our friends and family by foot. As we walked through our small town, we found ourselves in a maze-like wasteland, changing our route every other turn due to downed trees or power lines, or washed-out roads. Progressively, we found family and friends, greeting them with great relief and urgent questions: "Do you have enough water to drink? Do you have water for flushing? Do you need any food?" It would be nearly 6 days before any emergency relief could arrive with food, water, and supplies. Meanwhile, neighbors survived by the help of their neighbors. Churches opened their doors. Firefighters and first responders persisted, despite perilous rescue missions. Helicopters air-lifted stranded people to safety.

When I began this artwork, I naively hoped to gain insight into Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. In that process, I did not wish to become the lost sheep and live through the greatest natural disaster to hit my hometown in over a thousand years. But as I read this parable again, now over 6 weeks after the storm, what strikes me is the pursuit of the shepherd, so singularly focused on the one who is lost, vulnerable, and at-risk. The Good Shepherd steadies the sheep on his shoulders and steps out of the frame toward us. His gaze finds mine, and I almost hear him whisper, "I will never stop searching for the lost. I will never stop rejoicing when one is found." —Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

⁷ Karl Barth, 1886-1968, was a Swiss Reformed theologian. In a 1963 *Time Magazine* article, he urges young theologians to take the Bible and the newspaper and read both.

⁸ At the end of September 2024, Hurricane Helene hit the Southeastern US, devastating many regions, particularly Western North Carolina. Catastrophic flooding caused billions of dollars of damage, took hundreds of lives, and left many lives unaccounted for.