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“Lost...and Found”

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Luke 15:1-7

Today we are considering the sort of qualities that devoted mothers possess,
because those qualities reveal something of what God is like.

A loving and dedicated mother can make you feel special, understood and
completely loved.

And yet, mothers can also make you feel guilty like nobody else on earth.

I think of the man, who called his mother on Mother’s Day,
and asked her how she was doing. She said, “Fine, but I haven’t eaten in 10 days.”

He said, “Mom, that’s terrible, why not? Is something wrong?”

She said, “No, nothing is wrong, I just didn’t want my mouth to be full of food
in case you should call.”

Erma Bombeck wrote about some of the things her mom used to tell her:

“You will have fun on this vacation if I have to break every bone in your body.”

“When the lawn mower cuts off your toes, don’t come running to me.”

“If you don’t stop crossing your eyes they will get stuck that way and there is no
cure, no telethon, and no research program for frozen eyes.”

While some moms can really make you feel badly, they also have the ability to
make you feel cherished and dearly loved.

The love of a devoted mother comes closest to revealing the nature of God.

So today we honor and offer gratitude to all of those women in our lives
who have nurtured us, guided us, prayed for us, put up with us, and never stopped
loving us. Surely this is what God is like.

Let us pray:

Thank you gracious God for those mothers on earth and in heaven, and all those
who have been like mothers to us.

For the precious gift of their unconditional love, and unending support,
we are so very grateful. Help us to be worthy of such love and then to pass it on.

Amen.

Several years ago Dan Baber honored his mother by posting an auction on eBay entitled, "Best Mother in the World." He promised that the winning bidder would receive e-mails and phone calls from his mom, Sue. Baber also promised that his mom would "...make you feel like you are the most special person on the Earth."

I bizarre thing to sell, and you would assume nobody would be interested.

The auction lasted seven days, and 40,000 people viewed it. More than 100 people bid on it. The opening price was \$1. The winning bid was \$810. Can you imagine that? \$810 to get an email and phone call from a total stranger.

That's how hungry people are for some words of encouragement. Everyone wants to feel like they are "...the most special person on the Earth."

And because so many people never, ever feel that way, they spend their lives searching for it. They search in relationships and in addictions, in work and money.

Mother Teresa once said:

“Being unloved, uncared for, forgotten, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat ... Loneliness is the most terrible poverty of all.”

It is a form of poverty in which far too many people find themselves.

I am going to say a word, and when I say it, I want you to imagine a face. To recall a face and a name, someone who pops into your mind when I say the word. Are you ready?

The word is LOST. Lost. Do you see a face?

I see a face.. I see the face of a woman 47 years old, sitting under a green canopy furnished by the mortuary. She is surrounded by flowers and family, but she looks completely alone.

I see a face. I see the face of a man who has just been told after 35 years that his job is being terminated and his services will no longer be needed.

He is to clean out his office immediately.

I see the faces of my nephews ages 8 and 10 being told that both of their parents have died, and they will never see them again.

Whom do you see? Do you see yourself?

Jesus had such a very special place in his heart for those who were lost.

He once said that the reason he came to earth was to seek and save the lost.

And the 15th chapter of Luke is known as the “lost” chapter, not because it was misplaced, but because it deals with a lost sheep, lost coin, lost son.

As the chapter opens we find Jesus once again surrounded by those of doubtful reputation: sinners and outcasts.

Of course, this behavior is being harshly criticized by the Pharisees.

It was a scandal because Jesus received outcasts, shared table fellowship with them, even played host to them.

They said, “Look how he takes in sinners and eats with them.”

His response was not to defend or justify himself, but to talk about the lost.

He tells a story about a shepherd with 100 sheep who loses one.

He asks: “Wouldn’t you go into the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When you found it you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you go home celebrate that you found your lost sheep.

So there is more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over 99 people who do not need to be rescued.”

To seek and save the lost--that is what Jesus was all about.

Today I am mindful of mothers who do that, who never give up on children who are terribly lost.

Their mission in life is to love and save those whom others would have given up on a long time ago.

I know a woman whose son is in prison for doing something horrible.

He is serving a life sentence. And while it might be easier for her emotionally to distance herself from him, she does not. She writes him, visits, him, prays for him, and has found a whole new purpose in being a prison mom to several inmates.

I think of the woman who called a church one Monday morning and insisted that she speak to the Pastor.

She told him how her only daughter, now 25 was a crack addict and was going to lose her children, ages 1, 3, and 5 if she did not get treatment.

It was court ordered treatment, and it was expensive.
She was wondering, could the church give her \$500 so she could
make a deposit to a treatment center?
She could make monthly payments for the rest of her life,
but she needed a deposit to get her daughter in.
So he asked her, "Are you a member of our church?" "No."
"Have you ever attended our church?" "No."
"How did you decide to call us?"
"I was going through the phone book calling churches to see who could help me."
He told her NO and recited their policy:
"We help our members first, then people in our community,
but we only help them with food, rent, car repairs.
Never admission to a drug rehab center. I'm sorry," he said, but he really wasn't.
The next morning, when he arrived at the office.
There was a woman sitting in a chair just waiting for him.
He took her into his office and as she started to speak he recognized the voice.
That woman who wanted \$500 for her daughter.
She proceeded to tell him that she had called about 50 churches
He seemed to be the most compassionate of them all. She was out of options
If this church did not help her she would be forced to do something drastic.
This was her only child, her only grandchildren, and this was their only hope.
She was not giving up. He had to help her or she did not know what she would do.
It was not out of compassion that he finally helped her, but out of fear.
He realized that if he did not do something for this woman he would see her every
single day. He could tell that she was determined and persistent.
He wrote her a check for \$100 and then he called four other nearby churches.
He shared her story and asked them to match the \$100.
By the time she left, she had \$500 pledged from 5 different churches.
She would not give up on her lost child.

In December, 1988 a massive earthquake hit Soviet Armenia.
Max Lucado writes about Susanna Petroysan and her 4 year old daughter
who survived that horrible earthquake.

They were entombed in the remains of an apartment building.
Trapped in the pitch darkness, Susanna managed to make a small little nest
for herself and her daughter in the rubble.
Miraculously, her searching fingers found a jar of blackberry jelly still intact.
Over the next few days she fed the entire jar to her daughter, taking none herself.

But still, no help came.

Numb with cold, weak from hunger, Susanna began to lose hope for herself.

But her determination that her daughter would survive kept her going.
Fading in and out of consciousness, she was roused by her daughter's cry,
"Mommy I am so thirsty." Her daughter's need kept Susanna alive.
She recalled a survival story of some Arctic explorers who cut themselves
and gave some of their own blood to a friend dying of thirst.

She took that empty jelly jar and slammed it upon a rock

She took a shard of glass and cut her finger.

She gave the precious drops of blood to her thirsty daughter.
She did this again and again, using her own blood to keep her daughter alive.

Her determination to keep her daughter alive kept Susanna herself alive.

On the 8th day after the earthquake they were both found alive.

The daughter was just fine.

The mother was badly malnourished and dehydrated, but she had survived,
because she poured out her life in love for her child.

Now most of us will never live through anything so dramatic,
but we have all been lost.

We have all strayed from the path set before us, taken detours,
found ourselves adrift and bereft.

We have all been lost....but there is one who is always trying to find us.
And just like a shepherd seeking that one lost sheep and leaving the 99,
God comes along, gently picks us up and carries us back home.

All we have to do is stop running and let ourselves be found by the one who
created us, the one who knows us, the one who never lets us go.

Amen.