

Tears of Joy

Proper 19

Pastor Josh Frazee

Luke 15:1-10

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The author, artist, and designer Douglas Coupland is quoted in the September 2016 edition of Reader's Digest. He said, "There are three things we cry for in life: things that are lost, things that are found, and things that are magnificent." How true is that statement in your life?

Have you ever lost something so near and dear that you were literally crying because you couldn't find it? Perhaps it was a stuffed animal childhood friend. Maybe it was the letter your grandson or granddaughter wrote to you. Or maybe you've misplaced your cell phone or important documents from time to time. So many say that it'll show up in the quote-unquote "last place you look," but that really doesn't help you while whatever it is is still missing. You can search and search and seek and seek, and sometimes not find for days, months, or even years, if ever. You know what it is to lose something and so when you lose something so important or with emotional attachment, you might be literally driven to tears over its loss.

Or when you find something for which you've been searching, do tears ever start flowing from your eyes then? Again, it could be any number of things that you deem as important, and once you have found it, your tear ducts go into action. You're just so overjoyed to have found it! Sometimes, you may even do what Jesus said and call up your family, your friends, or your neighbors and share your good news.

Well that is our very text for this morning—the one where Jesus described a couple of people who lost items of great worth, and then found them, so that they rejoiced with their family, friends, and neighbors. Let's take a look and see if we can find something in this passage that is so magnificent it drives us to tears of joy.

Verse 1

“(Jesus) told (the Pharisees and scribes) this parable: ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.”’”

Many of you can probably relate to this parable in one respect or another. Among the elders, there have been stories of lost cows that have had to be collected. My mother tries really hard to keep organized, but every so often she puts away a paper that she needs and will have to go through all of her files and cabinets and drawers again until she can find it. A few days after his party, my nephew was putting together a Mega Blocks car and was working to put a couple pieces together and they went out of his hands; he had to keep looking for them until he found them or else his new car would not have been complete. Several of you can no doubt relate to these couple of accounts.

Granted, you may not throw a cow or Mega Blocks car over your shoulders, but there was celebration by my mother when she found the missing papers, and there was rejoicing by my nephew when he was able to put the pieces he had found on his new car. And depending on the importance of the lost item, or your age, you may have even invited others to rejoice with you when you found what you had lost—again, maybe not to the extent of throwing a party with cake and streamers, but your friends or family probably rejoiced with you to one extent or another. Hopefully they were not so cold as to just ignore your joy or dismiss it completely.

Each of these and you, then, can relate to Coupland's quote, as least so far as crying for things that are found. But again, not crying because of sadness, but of joy—the lost item or cow was found! Yet why would there have even been tears of joy if the item had not been lost? Surely tears of sadness or anxiety would have preceded those of joy. In the previous case in the parable, it was over a lost sheep—part of the shepherd's flock, and part of his income. Without that sheep, his payment would have been less—just like if the crops around Augsburg don't go just right, part of them might be lost, and that income would be gone at harvest, which is just a few short weeks away. Let's continue to look at these tears of sadness or anxiety as we follow Jesus' parable.

Verse 2

Jesus continued, “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.””

Once more tears of joy following tears of sadness or anxiety. Tears because the coin had been found—and tears before that because the coin was worth so much. The woman in the parable knew well what Coupland meant by tears for what is lost. That coin had a lot of value to the woman because it was part of her ability to buy what she needed.

Some of you have heard me ask before but I'll ask all of you: why do we consider this piece of paper (hold up money bill) to be more important than others? Why do we not tear this piece of paper or crumple it up like we do any others? Because it has value. Who says it has value? The government. So we all agree that this piece of paper is worth X amount of money because we trust what the government says—we have faith that it will be worth X amount wherever we spend it. That is also true of the woman's coin. It was worth a certain amount for her well-being according to her government. That's why it was so important to find, and that's why she may have even teared up until she could find it, and why she may have continued to cry, this time in joy, when it was found.

Now usually I ask that bit about the money concerning the validity of God's Word—that because He said it's His Word, we take it on faith that it is, and we value it. But this morning, we're taking that principle one step farther. Jesus told the Pharisees this parable about the two things being lost—the sheep and the coin; but why? Was it because the sheep had worth? Was it because the coin had worth? They do, but Jesus was getting at something deeper. Consider: how many tears do you cry when an item of yours is lost, or one of your cows? How much joy do you have when you get the item or cow back? Now consider, how much is that item or cow worth compared to your human neighbors? (Pause.) Human beings are worth much more, right? That's what most any human being will say, and it is what God Himself says. Wasn't it Jesus who said that we should not worry because we human beings are worth more than ravens or flowers of the field?

Verse 3

Then wouldn't it make sense for us to cry for our human neighbors? God has told us through His Word that all of humanity is lost—in sin. Granted you can see your friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers physically day to day or month to month, yet they are lost—not in a physical sense, but a very real spiritual sense. So how many tears have you cried for them? Or, to take it as far as Jesus did, how many tears have you cried for people you know to be blatant sinners? How often have tears come down your cheeks for those in I.S.I.S., or for those who go on shooting sprees, or for anyone else you might consider an enemy or blatant sinner? Are they not lost in sin, as you once were?

Or, if one of them should turn and repent, would you cry tears of joy that they had come to faith with you? Jesus said that there “will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance,” and that “there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Will you cry tears of joy with them? Again, you had been as lost as them when you were born. All of us were born into sin and the state of being eternally lost—lost and condemned to eternal torment in hell. But by the grace of God in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God and very God of very God who died for you to be found, you were indeed found. You were brought to repentance, and there was joy in heaven and before the angels of God because you were.

So do you think you should grumble with the Pharisees and scribes when those who are lost are found, or will you, through God’s Holy Spirit, rejoice with tears of joy? Yes, through God’s Spirit, you will go from crying tears of sorrow for their loss to tears of joy for their being found. What is more, you and I can cry tears even now. As Coupland put it, we cry for not only those things or ones who are lost or found, but also for things which are magnificent. Could we not cry tears for the magnificence of God in Christ Jesus for our being found? And having been found ourselves, could we not also cry tears for the magnificence of God in desiring that others be found and saved as well? Through God’s Spirit, we do, because like God, we desire that all would be found. For Jesus’ sake, and in His Name. Amen.