

Lord God, help us turn back to you when we feel lost. Amen

- In today's gospel, Jesus tells us 2 stories about things that are lost : Do you remember what was lost? a sheep and a coin
- and both times when the things are found, lots of people celebrate ,.... not just the person who found the sheep or the coin –
- they were so happy they wanted to share their joy and excitement with their friends and neighbours.
- The stories show us God's joy when someone who has drifted away from Him, feels the power of God's love, and is found again.
- Sheep feature heavily in the Gospels because Jesus used metaphors that the local people recognised, they may not mean so much to us in Baldock today but in 1st century Palestine sheep were a valuable commodity who needed a shepherd to look after them and keep them safe.
- The shepherd would bring them into a fold at night and sleep across the entrance as the "gate" to protect them from attack and being stolen, and in the daytime he would lead them to pasture and rescue them when they got into difficulties.
- If a sheep wandered far, the shepherd would be concerned about the sheep being in danger and unable to get back to the flock and would go looking for it, in order to rescue it
- Jesus, in John's gospel, said "I am the good shepherd" and "I am the gate" using the pictures that people would instantly recognise in the caring relationship between shepherd and sheep. But Jesus wants us all to see that the sheep represent us and the shepherd is Jesus. If we believe and trust in Jesus, we, as Christians, are part of Jesus' flock.
- So, imagine you are the sheep that gets lost – why did you get lost?
- Are you reckless, independent, a rebel, silly, a daydreamer?
- Anyway, for some reason you get separated from the flock and need rescuing.
- But, will we really learn our lesson, in other words not do it again? realise that it is better for our wellbeing to stay within calling distance of the shepherd?
- OK, so you are not a sheep, but perhaps the lesson to learn from the lost sheep is for us to keep looking up and checking in with those around us, making sure we're one of the flock still, all heading in the same general direction, though each with our own patch of grass to graze so to speak but still within the boundaries set by Jesus
- There are so many different denominations within Christianity, not just the biggest ones Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed, Pentecostal ,who acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and we respond to God's call to build His Kingdom in different ways-
- teaching, caring for the sick, manning Foodbanks, standing up for the vulnerable, running a family, helping with worship in church or simply using our Christian values to be the glue that holds things together in the situations we find ourselves in at work or at home: the one unifying key factor is that we keep Jesus central to all that we do – we let him be our shepherd
- our shepherd who is guiding ,protecting us and nurturing us and letting us experience the joy and strength and peace that God's love that He pours into our hearts through His Holy Spirit

- We need never worry that God “will have us back” because God is totally forgiving if we want to turn back to him.
- if we’re honest we have all been in situations where we find it hard to forgive others and as such we find it very hard to understand that God will let us start completely afresh every time we turn to him and repent and make a huge effort to change our ways.
- The Exodus reading shows the “stiff-necked” people of Israel not yet convinced of the love, forgiveness and wisdom of their God Yahweh.
- Moses has been up on the top of Mount Sinai for 40 days receiving the 10 commandments from God and lots of detailed instructions on how to build a sanctuary to Him and how to prepare worship and basically the Israelites had either felt abandoned or bored or a bit of both and had decided to look elsewhere for someone /something to worship and thank for bringing them out of slavery in Egypt
- so they built a golden calf and started to worship that.
- But still God did not abandon them, he listened to Moses’ pleas for mercy on their behalf and responded in a way we as humans find it hard to do.
- The Israelites blew a bit hot and cold towards following God but when they did, they experienced the sustaining joy that following Him brings.
- The lost coin - I can relate to the woman turning her house upside down looking for her precious coin –
- many a time I have looked frantically for my keys, my phone or the papers I need for a meeting because I have carelessly put the down and then allowed other things to be dumped on top of them.
- If I had more time to step back and organise myself, I would save a lot of stress.
- And likewise if we are disciplined enough to step back and make time each day to pray to God, especially to thank him for his love he gives us , we will I think find our lives less stressful and manageable.
- However, in this parable the woman is God and we are the coin which is lost – hidden under the everyday rubbish in our lives – hiding from God, from a God who wants to find us and love us.
- I think what comes out of these readings is :
- the corporate joy and celebration we can enjoy if we follow Christ rather than go off on our own path through impatience, thinking we know best or lack of self discipline and self esteem.
- So let us affirm our commitment this week by what we say and do that we are one of Jesus’ flock
- He is our shepherd who is guiding ,who is protecting us and who is nurturing us and letting us experience the joy and strength and peace that God’s love that He pours into our hearts through His Holy Spirit.
- Amen