**First Reading Joshua 5:9-12**

*By celebrating the Passover and eating the produce of the promised land instead of the miraculous manna that had sustained them in the desert, the Israelites symbolically bring their forty years of wilderness wandering to an end at Gilgal.*

9The Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

**Psalm 32**

1Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away! 2Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile! 3While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, because of my groaning all day long. 4For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer. 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin. 6Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them. 7 You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. 8“I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye. 9Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you.” 10 Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord. 11 Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

**Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

*One way to describe the gospel is the promise that in Christ everything is transformed into newness. All mistakes, all deliberate sins, all old history is reconciled with Christ’s resurrection. This is Paul’s strong message to the congregation in the city of Corinth.*

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if

anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Gospel Luke 15:1-3,11b-32**

*Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father’s love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father’s home.*

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” 3 So he told them this parable: 11b “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.” ’ 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for

this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost

**Sermon**

 When was the last time you lost something? We are always losing things in my house these days. Most of the time I’m losing my mind, but often we are losing Abby’s stuff. Recently, she had 2 Barbies in the car and when we got home and were getting out, one of them only had her 1 purple shoe on. So, we currently have a lost purple shoe in my car. Yesterday I was looking at an account number on a bill and I needed a magnifying glass to see how many zeros there were, so I had to search the house for a magnifying glass, of which we have 2. I actually pride myself on finding lost things, it’s like my superpower. I take it as a personal insult when I can’t find something that is lost. I feel very satisfied when I can find lost things. But, particularly when those things are of value, I feel a sense of accomplishment and certainly relief when I am able to find them.

 When was the last time you lost someone? I’m not referring to when a loved one dies in this case but instead, have you ever been somewhere with your spouse or your kids or a friend and all of a sudden you didn’t know where they were? I don’t mean to bring back bad memories with this question, but I know some of us have stories of losing track of a loved one and being panicked for a while. On at least one occasion, when I had Abby at Kid’s Town at Boardman Park, I couldn’t spot her for a while, and I panicked. Kid’s Town has a bunch of wooden tunnels that the kids can move through to get from one slide or play area to another

and it was so hard to keep track of where she was. I walked around and around, looking for her but couldn’t see her anywhere. Eventually, of course, I spotted her, and a feeling of relief and affection flooded over me. I wanted to run right over and hug her tightly…but she was moving too fast, there was too much playground between us, and she probably would have pushed me away and said, “Momma, what are you DOING?” After all, we’re really only grateful to be found if we realized we were lost in the first place.

 Today we have in front of us parts of Luke 15. This chapter contains 3 parables that generally follow the theme of the lost being found. Two of these parables are literally about lost things…the lost coin and the lost sheep. We’ll get those sometime in the summer. The parable in front of us today is the one we call the Prodigal Son. One commentator that I read this week pointed out the fact that we’ve come to give titles to these parables that focus on what was lost, the lost ones. But these parables…and I’ll focus specifically on the Prodigal Son today…these are parables about the joy of the one doing the finding, the joy of the father. That is why some have proposed this parable be called The Joy of the Father.

 Inevitably, when we hear this parable we find ourselves identifying with someone in the story. That’s what good stories do, they draw us into them. How many of you here today are oldest children? Often, those who are the oldest in their family identify with the older brother. How many of you here today are the youngest in your family, among your siblings? Often those who are the youngest identify with the younger brother. How many of you here are parents? Those who are parents may identify with the father.

 I can’t, in one sermon, go through the perspectives of each person in the parable, although I’ve probably tried that in past sermons. Today, I want to talk about the relational aspect of this story because, out of all 3 parables in Chapter 15 that address what’s lost being found, this is the parable that includes human beings in relationship to one another. The relationships here matter because of the context in which Jesus tells this parable. It is important to note that Jesus tells these parables after the Pharisees and the scribes grumble about Jesus welcoming and eating with tax collectors and sinners.

 In THIS parable a Father has 2 sons. And the Father has to relate to both sons, to convey the type of relationship he has with these 2 sons in different ways. The younger son messed up big time…he disrespected his father by asking for the inheritance early and he disgraced

himself by wasting it all. The older son did what was expected of him, worked hard, never stepped out of line. However, what happens in the relationship when the younger son wants to return? The Father runs out and embraces him, he celebrates that this relationship is being restored because, in this story, restored relationship was of greatest value. And what happens when the older son gets irked that his Father celebrates the younger son so excessively? The Father goes out to him and reminds him of their relationship, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

 How does this parable impact the view of the Pharisees and scribes? How does this parable shape our faith in God? Here we get a picture of God as a relational being, one who wants, values, pursues relationship with humanity. Out of the 3 parables about lost “things,” this is the one that assures the Pharisees and scribes that God’s relationship with those who were lost but have been found does not change or limit God’s relationship with them. In other words, God’s love is big enough for everyone. It reminds me of the conversation some parents have had with a child when they are expecting a baby. The child, and sometimes the parents, wonder how the parents will have enough love for 2 children instead of just one. And yet, there is always enough love for the next child.

 The reality is that Jesus came to expand the number of people to be embraced by God’s love. And the reality is that Christ remains working through the church today to expand the number of people who will be embraced by God’s love. Our faith is all about a relationship with our God whose love and mercy is way bigger and more expansive than we can grasp. Our faith is also about our God who desires relationship with all of humanity and between all of humanity. When that love finds and embraces one who has been lost…sometimes that is us, sometimes it is someone else…there is a great cause for celebration not only because that one has been restored in relationship with God but also because that one has been restored as a member of God’s family, as a sibling who was lost but has been found. Amen.