# Sermon 11th September 2016

Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51, 1Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-10

I got my engagement ring 6 years after we were married – we knew what we wanted but needed to save up – and with 8 children that was not easy! It was my prize possession. Not long after, I decided to redecorate the bathroom, which involved scraping quite a lot of paint off the wall. Because Fr Bob is useless at DIY, our daughter Ellie helped me, and after we had finished for the day, Victor looked at my hand and said – ‘where’s your diamond Mum?’ you can imagine the panic that went through my heart! We searched everywhere – I was convinced that it had gone down the drain when I washed my hands so my dear husband was taking sinks apart and lifting drain covers in the street, but to no avail.

I emptied the hoover bag, and Ellie patiently went through the bins that were full of paint scrapings, and after about 30 minutes, she came to me in my panic, and said those magic words ‘I’ve found it!’ Deep joy. I looked at what was in her hand and my heart sank – ‘that’s not my diamond’ I said! But, when she had peeled off all the paint, this unrecognisable blob became my diamond. She had found it, she saw through the state it was in, and she returned it to me.

In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus tells how the shepherd finds the one sheep that has gone missing – the one that looks like all the others – white and fluffy, who hasn’t any extraordinary attributes, who eats and drinks the same as all the others, but this one has strayed – gone off the path.

I used to tell this story to my children when they were little, and when the little sheep realized he was lost, he cried meh meh – and by this time the kids were crying too!

How much more the heart of God? The Shepherd leaves the 99 safely together and begins a search – and finds the little lost sheep – and the sheer joy of returning the lost sheep to the fold is overwhelming!

The lost coin is the same story – the search is on, meticulous cleaning and sweeping, lighting of lamps for dark corners – until the coin is found. The woman only had 10 coins, this one represented 1/10th of her entire wealth so she is absolutely overjoyed when she finds it.

Jesus ends his stories by saying how much joy there will be in heaven if even one sinner repents.

Paul knows the joy of salvation – he says ‘I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man who acted in unbelief and ignorance, BUT GOD saw through that and he received mercy, God saw the potential in him, He saw His own perfect creation – because of Jesus – and he poured his grace upon him. Paul says ‘if God can do this for me, the worst of men, then he can do this for anyone’, because God’s grace is boundless, God’s heart for finding you is endless.

In the Psalm, David has just ‘done the deed’ with Bathsheba and he’s overcome with remorse.

As Christians we need to realise that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect. We are still human; we still make mistakes, it’s just worse now for us now than it was before we came to faith! We feel it more don’t we, we ask ourselves questions like ‘why does God bother with me, I keep letting Him down’, or ‘why aren’t I a better person, why can’t I be kind, loving and good all the time?’

This is the mode David is in – he is a miserable sinner, he feels dirty, he wants to start again and be clean and he wants God to recreate a new heart, BUT GOD likes the heart he already has – he sought David out, and made him king. Now God has found him here, not in glory and triumph, but in guilt and pain, in self-reproach and in despair, and He loves David just as much as ever before.

In Exodus, God’s people are described as ‘stiff-necked’ how I love that phrase – a still necked people – that’s what we are! All of us turn away from God and go our own way; we leave the straight path and do other journeys that aren’t towards God. The Israelites, like us, had known the goodness of God but still chose to turn away. BUT God changed his mind from punishment, and sought them out to bless them.

It’s OK to be human, to fail, to make mistakes, so we need return that gaze to Jesus and rely on His grace to put things right – we can’t do it alone!

We try too hard when all we need to do is rest and lean on Jesus – don’t beat yourself up - when you look at yourself you may think that you are just a mess - but when God looks at us, He looks past all the grime and dirt of sin, through the unrecognisable messes that we are, He sees his spotless creation. He sees Jesus.

You are not just another sheep, you are a very important part of a flock, God’s flock and he has found you. God never ‘unfinds’ you, He keeps prodding at us, seeking for the Jesus in us, making us more aware of that and the need of grace and mercy.

I did not recognize my diamond in the covering it was in, and yet a diamond it was. When God looks at us, this is what he sees. There is rejoicing in heaven because we are His. Now all we need to do is to look for that Jesus bit in others, past the bits we don’t like to the real person that God has sought out and also rejoices over.