



Your hearts starts beating faster as you realize your daughter has somehow disappeared from your side. You turned away *just for a moment* to reach for something higher up on the store shelf. The panic begins-it's hard to breathe. How did she get away? She couldn't have gotten far, could she? Your wife will kill you flits through your mind. The awful Amber Alerts that tell everyone a child is lost. Everyone will know that you lost your child. Everyone will know that you didn't keep your child safe.

Fortunately, much of the time the child is found, unharmed and curious about the fuss. Glad to be reunited with his family though. A place that's safe. A place that's known. A place where he is loved. It's good to be back in the fold.

As adults and as children who can read and process logically, we don't get physically lost too often- or if we do we can use the GPS on our phones or read street or store signs to find our way back. Being lost doesn't have quite the terror for us that it can have for little ones. However, if you are in Russia or China or someplace where the alphabet is not the one we use, you can't read the street or store signs and you can get lost pretty easily – so we're not automatically safe from this kind of distress just because we're grown up.

A meaningful and growing adult life in some respects is always about getting lost and finding our way. It may not be physically lost. It might be emotionally or psychologically lost. Often these are the times when we take stock of our life and discern the way forward – which sometimes can be quite different from where we've been or thought we wanted to go. Sometimes, we get lost in order to come back to where we are, comforted that we are, in fact, on the right path.

Simon Sinek is an author, speaker, entrepreneur and innovator who gave a TED Talk that went viral. His talk- and book – Start with Why¹- encourages us to find our “why”. When we know our “why” we then live from a place of empowerment, fulfillment and joy. We are, to use the Army's slogan: “the best we can be”. And when we are the best we can be, our world becomes a better place. Imagine a world where everyone was operating as the best they could be because they knew their “why”- they knew why they got up in the morning, why they worked where they

¹ Simon Sinek. Start With Why (New York: Penguin, 2009)

do, what their gifts and talents are and how to deploy those gifts and talents for the betterment of all. Our world would be a better, more just, more loving place.

One of Simon's other books is called Together is Better². He suggests that we, as humans, do better and our world does better when we work and are together. Recent studies have suggested that one of the ailments in our modern society is loneliness. That even though most of us have cell phones and internet access and we tend to be on our phones and the internet a lot, we are increasingly feeling lonely and isolated. Did you know that suicide is the number one cause of death of white males over 65?

While there are a variety of reasons for these and other suicides, a major one appears to be loss of connections, loss of purpose, loss of why. Loss of connections: too often no longer working so no longer connected to a workplace with other people; perhaps children have moved away and there is relatively little interaction; perhaps a spouse has died; perhaps the person never cultivated friends or outside activities. A feeling of "nothing to live for."

I periodically have breakfast with a man in his 60s. Our conversations are not always sweetness and light and this time, given where the conversation had gone, I asked him what his values are. I've sensed a growing disaffection with life and a growing bitterness that today is different from when he grew up, that his dreams for what his life would be have been denied, as he sees it, by the changes in our culture. I was curious what kept him going and thus the question: what are your values. His answers saddened me and, quite frankly, they worry me. The answers had no sense of community or connection to others – and one of his values is that he doesn't have to pay to care for anyone else. This is someone that I've known for a while who is vehemently opposed to our social welfare and social justice programs. Ok, he and I often come from different places politically but still, isn't there any sense of our Christian responsibility to care for the least and the lost? No, he said. Well, I'm not quite writing him off but his values did take me a bit by surprise and sadden me. He feels he no longer matters in our world today.

Jesus tells us that we matter. He will come looking for us when we are lost. Physically or emotionally or spiritually. Jesus wants us to be part of the community of saints. Jesus knows that we do better together and that part of being together is we learn to listen to each other, to reach out a hand when someone is hurting, to offer support when someone is in need. This doesn't mean handouts – it does mean holding each other responsible to be the best we can be. It does mean recognizing that any one of us doesn't have all the answers: together we are better.

Although some of us cringe when Jesus leaves the 99 in the fold to go chasing after the one – it seems pretty irresponsible, if we are the one, I bet we all would want Jesus to leave the 99 and come find us. We can argue that the 99 are safe in the sheepfold, surrounded by a high fence with a gate – and hopefully there's a border collie or two to chase the adventurous back into the sheepfold if they get too frisky.

What would it be like if you are the one, you escaped the sheepfold because Jesus was busy tending to a gash that another sheep got and so you slipped out that gate to explore the world- but

² Simon Sinek. Together is Better (2016)

Jesus didn't come after you? What would it be like to get lost and no-one notices you are missing? No one notices you are lost? I think that's where despair and the loneliness comes in and sometimes suicide seems to be the only way out – it isn't by the way, but I'm wondering if that's the feeling that sometimes leads to those choices.

What difference does it make in your life if you know Jesus watches over you? That Jesus will leave those other 99 sheep safe and secure and come find you to bring you back to the fold? Not to confine you with black-and-white rules and regulations but rather because we do better together. We do better when we know our why and we use our skills and talents to help create a world that is closer to God's kingdom on earth.

You and I are sometimes that lost sheep or the lost coin. Life throws us curve balls and what we thought would happen doesn't. But if we know our why: we know who and whose we are and that we have gifts and talents to offer the world, we can still get up out of bed each morning knowing that we do matter. We do have value, even when it may not seem like it. We are what Jesus seeks to redeem and to restore to community. And community is the place where we can be supported when need be until we feel whole again. Community is the place where sometimes we need to be and just rest- sit in that back pew and simply take in this beautiful space, wonderful music, the light coming through the stained glass windows and know that God is present. God loves you and cares for you – and will seek you out when you escape the sheepfold.

The store loudspeaker comes on “Will the parents of Allison please come to Customer Service”? What was lost is found. Jesus is with us, now and forever, lost or found. There is no place we can go that He cannot find us. There is no place we can go where he does not seek us. Amen.