

Once, when I was still pretty small, my family came together to celebrate something at a park. The park, when we got there, was full of people. A huge crowd with stalls and booths -- perfect for a tiny human to get lost in. I scampered away for a few moments, happy and excited, and I was quickly left behind by my family. I started whimpering, and then crying, then full out sobbing with terror. It was scary enough to be lost, but scarier still was the fear: what if they meant to leave me behind?

In the crush and press of the crowd, a woman came forward, two children in tow. She proceeded to pick me up, leaving her two children with a friend, and search for my family. I told her to look for tall people, loud people, and she said, "I'm looking for a mother who is looking for you." And she found her -- my mother, alone, frantically scanning the crowd, calling my name and looking for my face. She cried out when she saw me and embraced the woman who found me. And there I was, squished between two mothers, one who lost me and the other who found me, and instead of anger, there was celebration. The party became my party; I was treated like a precious gift the whole day.

In reflecting on our gospel today, I want to suggest this as a possible lesson: it is not always our fault when we are lost. Especially for tiny humans, who have a whole flock of people attempting to shepherd them, this is important to remember. Sometimes we are the sheep, and sometimes we are the flock, but the act of losing belongs equally to both situations, and rarely is it intentional. As the flock, we

always assume we know who the real losers are, but Jesus reminds us it's more complicated than that. His sheep will hear his voice, regardless of whether they are lost or found, poor or powerless, sinful or sad. He calls us each by name and no one can snatch us out of his hand.

As the sheep, perhaps we have to lose something to follow our Shepherd. I suspect we all certainly have moments where we lose ourselves to anger, pain, loss, or fear, but so it goes in the life of sheep. But that means losing is not a discrete event in the life of the flock. Instead, losing is actually the moment we hear the eternal call of the Shepherd in our lives. We wouldn't, after all, need to listen so hard for the Shepherd's voice if we were always by his side and knew where we were going. Losing, then, becomes — an inevitable reality: in each instance of loss, we can learn to hear the call of God better.

Think of how in this inevitable reality of loss, the Shepherd's promise is clear, both in Scripture and on the Eucharist table. From every nation, from every people, from all tribes and languages, — sheep will be found, comforted, sheltered, and fed. The Lamb who is also Shepherd will wipe every tear from their eyes. That is how our second reading describes it. So even in the midst of loss, the fear and brokenness that mark those moments, God's presence remains. We reflect on this, actually, every time we come to the eucharist. "Be known to us, Lord Jesus, in the breaking of the bread". It was only in the moments after the crucifixion where the flock thought

we had lost everything, that the full grace of a resurrected Jesus became known to us. Through the breaking of body, the loss of life, the Glory of God has become fully revealed to us. And it is true for us, too: the breaking of the body is the moment that we come despite our own loss and brokenness to become the Body of Christ together. In the breaking of the bread, we become united, and resurrected and found.

Let me sketch this in a different way. As a theology student at BC, it is my vocation to speak about God in ways that are considered articulate and elegant. My professors mark me for wisdom, my ability to argue a point or exegete a biblical passage. But here, at Good Shepherd, my vocation has nothing to do with grades, papers or arguments. Instead, I am a church teacher for children, and my vocation turns away from articulation and elegance. It is instead found in something wholly different.

—I spend the whole of my week, —, arguing about God and the sacraments in classes; I'm taking seminars on all the ways the church has failed its parishioners, and the ways people have failed each other. I'm fluent in three different academic languages to talk about sin, brokenness and failure. It's all too easy to feel my own wounds and lost-ness in the face of all that; it is often difficult for me to remain hopeful.

But the 40 minutes that I teach tiny humans downstairs is marked by a different kind of theological reflection. We talk about death and resurrection, whether Jesus makes mistakes, the difference between magic and miracles, whether or not saints are just like us, and if Heaven has cupcakes. (smile and pause) I'm always struck by how newly impressed your children are by the theology I've long since stopped analyzing, how they consider everything and are suspicious of anything that does not support a loving, careful Shepherd. We play, downstairs, and trust that God loves us. We pray, downstairs, and believe that God loves us. We snap crayons because they makes the same sound as the eucharist host being broken, and we know that -- while snapping crayons is bad -- God still, always, permanently loves us.

I have learned from your children that sometimes the basic theology is the best: God loves us, the Incarnate Deity wants to hear all about our day, the Holy Other wants us to be found, our Shepherd will follow us wherever we go in order to bring us home. It's clear to me in these 40 minutes that your children also hear their names being called by the Shepherd, just as much as I or any other adult. But it isn't until we come upstairs, to you, that I see how we all are called together. If every sheep is called from every nation, tribe and language, surely that includes the nation of children, the tribe of children, the laughing, shrieking, sometimes incomprehensible language of children. We are united, young and mature, wiggly and serene, in the body of Christ when we come back together, and that's the way it should be.

Those 40 minutes on Sunday that I serve the children of this community are preparation for the moment we return to the eucharist table together, it's true, but it is also preparation for their unique ministry as children of this church. I know it is difficult, in the midst of prayer, to be interrupted by a high shriek of frustration. I know it is challenging to hear the clatter of stacked up hymnals hitting the ground during the procession, as if Jericho is falling for the second time. But their delight and confusion in taking the bread, hands cupped earnestly before them; their seriousness and wonder in reciting the Lord's Prayer; their challenging questions and heartfelt prayers: this is how your children follow the Shepherd's call, ---.

I often think of that moment at the park -- the moment I was lost and found by two mothers. I was celebrated because I had been found, but I think there was a celebration of something else, as well. It was a moment of unity, of hope fulfilled; two broken and separated people of the world came together to do one really good thing in the midst of loss. This is our eschatological hope, the picture painted so beautifully in our reading from Revelation today, when all the lost and broken nations, tribes and families come together again under the Shepherd's call. This is what we have faith will happen perfectly... someday. Until then, I hope you can see it here, however imperfectly, right before your eyes? After the passing of the Peace, your children will come back upstairs, you'll be united with each other at the table, and you'll remember that there is a Good Shepherd, who calls us all by name: to be

one family, one flock, even in the midst of our being lost, and in the midst of our being found.