

Maybe some of you have felt that unwelcome feeling when you need a coin or a £5 note to pay someone -usually someone waiting at the door and you can't find the money.

And maybe like me **your** go to place is down behind the cushion of your favourite chair. It's amazing how often I've successfully recovered the required coins from behind a cushion. I am sure we have all lost coins. One of the lasting legacies of Janie Stuart's time with us was a quiet revolution in the way the manse has dealt with lost coins. It would be too much to claim that we no longer lose coins, but our system has been tidied up. When she left, she gave Norma a lovely silver finish, felt lined box into which we now put our spare change for the first 10 days of the month and then remove again over the last 10 days of the month.

Yes, I've lost many a coin and had to crawl around the floor looking for it. There is something comforting in imagining that God is crawling around with you too, isn't there? God stretching his godly hands through the dust under the chest of drawers helping you search.

Yes, I've lost many coins, but, strangely, I have never lost a sheep. Although we did once lose Sammy, our black and white three legged cat, for a week when we lived in Girvan. As you can imagine with only three legs, Sammy found jumping over walls simply impossible. So we were quite stumped at how she managed to disappear from our walled, fortress like garden.

Now in the theatre there is the idea of the fourth wall. This is the invisible wall between audience and actors. The audience can see through the wall, but the actors pretend they cannot. Much of modern drama is based on demolishing that fourth wall. That is what we felt must have happened as we thought about our drama of the missing cat.

'The only way out of our garden was to break down the fourth wall,' I said.

'Or', said Norma patiently,

'Perhaps you left the back gate open and she hopped through. Then you came back and shut the gate.' 'No, it was the broken fourth wall,' I maintained.

Guess what though, we were both right because a week later a rather thin Sammy reappeared in our garden and where once she had been black and white, now she was black all over. A clue we thought.

It seems that Sammy had left through an open gate in the fourth wall, taken refuge in a nearby coal cellar whose owners had promptly gone off on holiday for a week. It was only on their return that poor Sammy was released back through the fourth wall or yes perhaps, returning through the gate that we had left open each day hoping she would return.

The return of Sammie set off a great celebration in Roodlands road that evening. Whiskas all round was the cry.

Lost cats, lost keys, Lost coins, lost sheep. Yes, there are many things we can lose in life, but Jesus in the bible readings today tells us that he goes the extra mile to find a lost coin or a lost sheep.

It's easy to look at this story and get side tracked into wondering what made that coin special? Did it mark an anniversary or was it put aside for a special reason? Why did the woman hunt so hard for it. Luke doesn't tell us whether or not the woman was poor.

It's time to face the fact that this isn't a comfortable wee story about coins or sheep at all. This is about people and how we treat

each other and it's about God and his people and how we treat each other.

This turns out to be a strange story of expectations and reminders. Expectations we have of God and God has of us and reminders of the character of God.

Luke records these stories of Jesus to prompt us to ask questions.

Yes God is madly happy when someone turns back to him, but this is a picture of God reading the roll of his world.

It's a huge roll, not just all the church members, but all the people he has created. Everyone.

There's no supplementary roll when it comes to God. Just one long roll of equality.

You can imagine him anxiously counting us all up to make sure none of us is lost.

He is an efficient god, isn't he?

We are relieved when the lost sheep is found and when the lost coin is reclaimed No one is surprised at the resulting moment of joy. There is so much joy that you need to invite the neighbours and friends around to share it with you. That's a bucket load of joy.

The farmer and the woman want to celebrate

The simple question left unanswered is do the friends come along?

Do they appear? Were they embarrassed or confused or ...what?

What do they think of these two?

After all farmers lose animals, people lose coins. No reason to go wild about it.

Luke will help us answer that question next week in his parable of the prodigal son.

But this is a wild celebration of what God with you means. It's a demonstration of God's basic character and it's not the first time the Bible writers have shown us God's very determined character when he speaks with his people.

Remember Moses in Exodus where he is faced with God acting so out of character that he has to remind God just what he is actually like.

God is unhappy with the people when they make golden calves. Idols of a god.

But Moses looks at the angry God and tells him a story.

The story of the relationship back through many years between God and Abraham and Isaac.

He reminds God of all the promises he has made down through the years.

He is saying God, hang on a minute, remember your real character.

Embrace it now, change your mind. Don't punish the people.

Don't throw your relationship out the window

If you act so out of character now then everything you did before becomes worthless.

Good advice from Moses not just to God but to us too in this time of lockdown, isn't it?

But it seems strange to us for God to be talking like this with Moses. Are the bible writers really thinking about Moses here, not God? Is it a sudden moment of clarity for Moses rather than God?

God is the one who has spent so much time building relationships. At this moment of apparent loss up on a mountain with God,

Moses comes away from his conversation more tightly bound to God's people than before. No matter how annoying or how seemingly stupid they can be.

As you read on in the book of Exodus you see just how angry Moses does get with the people of God, but you see too how he asks God not to punish them because he values the idea of relationships so highly.

These are stories designed to make us ask questions of just who God is and just how he wants us to live.

It's maybe of special significance at present isn't it?

We've lost our normal life temporarily.

How and when will we find it again?

What will it look and feel like?

When we do eventually celebrate the removal of current restrictions How will we celebrate when we know that so many people will be grieving?

A sobering thought.

Luke starts this passage with a note reminding us that sinners and tax

Jesus sought people in difficulty out.

For Jesus these were wonderful creatures of god

He treats everyone the same.

That's an attitude for us to try on for size, isn't it?

These stories are not just about sheep and coins, they are about people and how we treat each other and about God and his people and how we treat each other.

Rejoice with me I have found the lost sheep, says Jesus the shepherd. The shepherd who not only tells these stories, but lives them too.

Go on rejoice with him, he has found you.

Rest in his reassuring presence with you always and treat others as Jesus did by sharing god's peace with them

Peace be with you,

Amen