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Spending Found Coins

God is deeply in love with each of us. Each and every person in the world – no exceptions. And not just humanity in general, but each and every person, even just one. To make this truth about God plain, Jesus tells two parables, about a lost sheep and a lost coin, and about how their owners searched and searched until they found even just one who was missing.

I cannot hear the parable of the woman searching for the lost coin without thinking about my mother. When I was five I was playing with the things in my mother's jewelry box. One thing there particularly fascinated me, an opal that had once been set in a ring, but had come loose from its finding. I liked this opal a lot. I liked how it sparkled, how its iridescence gave it different colors depending on how you held it and in what kind of light. I liked looking at this opal so much, I took it out of the box and carried it around until I became more interested in something else, and I lost the small stone. When I told my mother, she began the most thorough

search of our house I had ever witnessed. She looked under rugs, between the sofa cushions. She swept. She looked everywhere. She was so energetic in her search – what was lost must be so precious. I had no idea my mother owned such a treasure. Did my mother own precious gems? My surroundings seemed rather ordinary to me, but with my mother acting like I had misplaced the Hope Diamond, was I really the daughter of royalty?

I asked my mother, “Was that little stone the most precious jewel?” “No,” she said, “There are jewels worth far more, that cost far more. But this one was given to me by my great aunt, and since she gave it to me, it’s precious to me and I want to find it.” (By the way, the stone did turn up, about four months later. Now I have it in my jewelry box, and it is precious to me because it belonged to my mother.)

Jesus says, God is like a woman who, when she loses one of her ten silver coins, does not say, “Well, I still have nine others, that will just have to do.” No, the woman turns her house upside down until she finds one lost coin.

The parish I served in Milwaukee has an endowment that was started from found coins. Two parishioners started it and others joined in. When they find change on the ground, it goes into the endowment for outreach. They collect their found coins during the year in a jar, and then put them in

the Easter offering, so this found money can be used to serve people who need it. What started as some found change in a coin jar is now above \$25,000. People who participate in this project get really excited about finding money. Sometimes the money is easily accessible. You see a penny and pick it up. Sometimes one has to be a bit more adventurous. It happened more than once that I was riding my bicycle down a busy street and saw a bright shining quarter. A whole quarter for the jar! I'm elated! But then I have to think fast: is there a bus coming behind me? Should I stop in the middle of the road? In traffic? For just one coin? What risks should I take?

Thankfully God has no such limitations. God is like a woman who will turn her house upside down to find even just one coin. God is like a shepherd who will search high and low for even one sheep. There are no bramble bushes, no deep ravines, no alley-ways or hidden corners or closets into which God will not go to find those who are lost. Even just one.

The woman is so excited at finding her one lost coin that she calls all her friends, we have to celebrate! I found my coin that was lost!

And just like that, says Jesus, the angels of God rejoice over even just one person who was lost and is found, who repents, who comes home, who

allows God to embrace them and say, you are mine. I love you. I would search and search the whole world if I had to. Even for just one.

Jesus tells these parables because a group of people is grumbling about what kind of people Jesus is busy finding, who Jesus eats with, who gets invited to Jesus' table. These grumbling people are religious people, sure that they themselves are safely in God's sheepfold, safely deposited into God's change purse.

Maybe they didn't realize that they too were lost ones that God was trying so hard to gather up. Did they know that God was turning the world upside down to find tax collectors and sinners, and good religious people, to claim us all as God's own sheep, God's own precious coins?

That's what God does. From the beginning, God's Spirit has been sweeping through the world seeking people to rejoice in belonging to God, whether they deserve it or not. And in Jesus, God really did do something to turn the whole world upside down. The God of the universe came among us as a human baby named Jesus, lived and died as one of us, stretched his arms out to us from the cross to welcome the lost, the least, the losers, even just one.

God still yearns to gather us all up, so that not even one more person ever feels lost, like they have to do it on their own, that they're not worth a cent, because even just one is precious to God.

It is significant that when the woman finds the coin that had been lost, she throws a party for all her friends. Hear the irony: the woman may be thorough, but she's not miserly. She may be meticulous, but she is not a wizard of home economics. She found one coin, and then spent who knows how many to throw a party! Is it irony – or is it grace?

If God is like the woman in the story, we are like the coins. And if we are the coins in the story, so precious to God that even just one is worth everything, and the occasion of finding just one is cause for great celebration, then we are God's coins, and our lives are to be spent in the cause of seeking and finding and celebrating.

Think about this: we are God's coins. Our coins, the coins in our coin jars and purses and jingling in our pockets, have the image of one of our presidents, or one of our states on them. We are God's coins. We bear the image of God – no less than that – each and every one of us bear no less than the image of God. We are God's coins. Made and minted with all the potential that any coin has – to be spent in a way that makes something happen. Really to be agents of change – pardon the pun—but it's true. A

coin not spent is just its potential. Saving may in fact, be a good thing. But saving for what. And if the coin is never spent, it never effects the change it is meant to. It never brings about something new. We are God's coins. Precious, valuable – even just one -- able to cause change, to bring about something new, to address some need, to bring some delight, to serve some purpose. We are God's coins. And God doesn't just tuck us away in some safe deposit box, a heavenly coin collection waiting for our value to increase. God says, let's have a party now.

Even just one means everything to God. Even just one is cause for great celebration. Even just one who offers himself or herself to be spent for God's purposes is a great blessing for the whole neighborhood.

In our worship, and in our attempts to be good stewards, we practice God's economics. We gather, acknowledging that all that we are and have comes from God, belongs to God, is loved by God, can be given and offered and spent for God. We offer our time, our talents, our money in God's service in our parish and in the world. Our ministries are varied, but each one is valuable, each one is important to God, because even just one enables us to continue God's work of seeking and finding and celebrating. Even just one. Even just you. Even just me. Precious to God. Found by God. To be spent for God.

How will you spend yourself today?