

**“Until She Finds It”
Luke 15:1-10**

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”¹ So prayed the Psalmist out of whatever pain and fear were closing in on his life.

“Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why do dishonest people succeed?”² So pondered the prophet, Jeremiah.

“How long must I cry for help before you listen? Why do you make me see such trouble? How can you stand to look on such wrongdoing?”³ So cried the prophet, Habakkuk.

That is, when is this the Promised Land you have been talking about ever since you called Abraham and Sarah, our parents in faith, going to be a reality? When are you finally going to set this crazy world right side up as you have promised for so long?

The short answer can be heard in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin – not until he finds every lost sheep; not until she finds every lost coin. It appears that God doesn't want to lose anyone or anything. **“[Christ] was supreme in the beginning,”** writes the Apostle Paul, **“and — leading the resurrection parade — he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross.”**⁴

What's taking so long? The question reflects our impatience. When will all of life's brokenness be fixed? But it's more than impatience. It can be a matter of life and death. It was the dominant question at the end of the first century when Christians were persecuted for their faith and couldn't understand why Jesus still had not ushered in his kingdom. The Second Letter of Peter offers this answer: **“Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change.”**⁵

It's a question we still ask today. After all, for 2000 years we've been praying, **“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

What's taking so long? God is incredibly patient with us. **“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”**⁶ **“God is love.”**⁷ **“And Love is patient.”**⁸

Would that we were as patient with God as God is with us.

Listen to one of my favorite parables, “Rag-Tag Army” by an Episcopal priest, Martin Bell.⁹

I think God must be very old and very tired. Maybe he used to look splendid and fine in his general’s uniform, but no more. He’s been on the march a long time, you know. And look at this rag-tag little army! All he has for soldiers are you and me. Dumb little army. Listen! The drum beat isn’t even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see? God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of his tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a field, or whose food got tangled in the underbrush. He’ll never get anywhere that way. And yet, the march goes on.

Do you see how the marchers have broken up into little groups? Look at that group up near the front. Now, there’s a snappy outfit. They all look pretty much alike – at least they’re in step with each other. That’s something! Only they’re not wearing their shoes. They’re carrying them in their hands. Silly little band. They won’t get far before God will have to stop again.

Or how about that other group over there? They’re all holding hands as they march. The only trouble with this are the ones on each end of the line. Pretty soon they realize that one of their hands isn’t holding onto anything – one hand is reaching, empty, alone. And so they hold hands with each other, and everybody marches around in circles. The more people holding hands, the bigger the circle. And, of course, a bigger circle is deceptive because as we march along it looks like we’re going someplace, but we’re not. And so God must stop again. You see what I mean? But he’ll never get anywhere that way!

If God were more sensible he’d take his little army and shape them up. Why, whoever heard of a soldier stopping to romp in a field? It’s ridiculous. But even more absurd is a general who will stop the march of eternity to go and bring him back. But that’s God for you. His is no endless, empty marching. He is going somewhere. His steps are deliberate and purposive. He may be old, and he may be tired. But he knows where he’s going. And he means to take every last one of his tiny soldiers with him. Only there aren’t going to be any forced marches. And, after all, there are frogs and flowers, and thorns and underbrush along the way. And even though our foreheads have been signed with the sign of the cross, we are only human. And most of us are afraid and lonely and would like to hold hands or cry or run away. And we don’t know where we are going, and we can’t seem to trust God – especially when it’s dark out and we can’t see him! And he won’t go on without us. And that’s why it’s taking so long.

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Endnotes

1. Psalm 13:1-2
2. Jeremiah 12:1
3. Habakkuk 1:2
4. Col. 1:18-20 (*The Message*)
5. 2 Peter 3:8-9 (*The Message*)
6. Psalm 103:8
7. 1 John 4:16
8. 1 Corinthians 13:4
9. From *The Way of the Wolf*, p 89-91