

“The Parable of the Lost Clip”

Psalm 14; Luke 15:1-10 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn

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Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might seek for the rightness of your realm deep in our souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.

It really has been quite a week. But I need to tell you about this other thing that happened to me last Sunday. This is going to get a little personal, but I promise not to talk about my teeth! The thing is, glorious tresses like these don't just happen. Gentle, bouncy curls like this are not the natural state of most anyone's hair, and certainly not mine! Hair like this happens because of hot rollers. Now, this story is not really about hair, but you need to know that to understand what comes next.

My primary set of hot rollers – yes, I have two, because I bought a travel kit a year ago, and it's been a great investment – but my primary set has twenty rollers in it: six large, five medium, and nine small ones. For each of those rollers, there is a clip of matching size. The clips you see on the screen are the medium size, which are the ones this story is about. Now, you might imagine that with an essential part like this, that is also quite small, that a company would include, say, one or two extras in each size, just in case. But you would be wrong if you imagined that. There is exactly one clip for each roller. Now, I never use all twenty of them at once, so perhaps losing track of a clip or two might not be that big of a deal. But I don't always use the same

ones, depending on how much curl I'm looking for, so I like the flexibility of knowing all the hot rollers are available because all the clips are present and accounted for. As long as I have had this set of rollers, I've been super conscientious about putting them away in their spot, all of them facing the same direction in their separate slots, organized by size. Honestly, the way I keep track of my hot roller clips reminds me of those pictures you see of guys who arranged their tools on a peg board in the garage, where there's an outline for each tool, showing where it fits, so that "there's a place for everything and everything in its place." I could not possibly live my life like this in most ways, but when it comes to hot roller clips, I am committed to it. I think it's the sheer horror of trying to find replacements or feeling like I want to buy a replacement set even though only one clip is missing. I'm not saying it makes sense; it's just the way it is.

Now, honestly, it's not that hard to keep track of these things. You put them on one at a time; you take them off one at a time. As long as you don't toss them around the bathroom, they should be easy to keep in order. So imagine my shock, last Sunday morning, as I was still putting the rest of the rollers in my hair, when one of them just sprung off my head, like it was a cricket or something! The roller itself, of course, was heavy enough that it just clattered to the floor by my feet. But the clip? It flew through the air so fast, I didn't see where it went. And now you start to see that we're arriving at the point of this story. I was, as I said, in the middle of putting the

rest of the rollers in my hair. But as I've also mentioned, I'm a little bit anxious about keeping track of those clips. So I start looking around. It should be somewhere close by, right? But it's not. It's vaguely the same color as the nearby carpet, so I start looking more carefully. Now, mind you, by the time I'm putting my hair in rollers on a Sunday morning, there is a pretty tight timeline for me to get to church. So I clearly can't do a thorough search at the moment. But also, it should be right here, shouldn't it? Do you ever have this feeling when you lose something: like you start to feel a little crazy, because you know the thing exists, and you know it should be right here, but it just isn't, and that makes no sense?

I had to give up and come to church. It's fine; in the grand scheme of things, this is not a big deal. But when I got home later that day, of course, I resumed my search. And it was still nowhere to be found. It wasn't under the thing, or under the other thing. It hadn't fallen into the box of CDs or into the trash can. I even got my nail file and felt under the quarter-round at the bottom of the wall right behind where I was standing; it wasn't there. It's at moments like this that you start to wonder about "portals" and other dimensions, and where all the missing socks go, right? Things can't just disappear. But it seemed like it had. I started to think about this woman in our story today, who turned on all the lights and swept every corner until she found her missing coin. If I ever found that thing, I was going to be tempted to tell all my friends and neighbors about it! But also, it was Sunday night, and I was worn out. So

I just went to bed with the uneasiness of someone wondering if there was a doorway to another universe right there in the bathroom.

Mondays bring a fresh start sometimes, and in my case, since it's my day off, it meant I had time to really look. And I found my hot roller clip. I still don't understand how it got where it was. It had flown ten feet from where I was standing, but somehow had managed to land less than an inch from the other side of the rocking chair. I'm not clear how such a trajectory is possible, unless maybe it bounced off the dresser, which would mean it went even farther than ten feet. The important thing is that I found it.

Well, actually no, that's not the important thing. The important thing here is that it got me wondering about God feels when things get lost. The parables of lost things that Jesus was telling were showing the presumably righteous people how ecstatic God is when less righteous people are found and brought home. The psalm we read talks about God searching the earth for righteousness and not finding it, finding instead only poor people being preyed upon by those in power. Does God get that panicky, something-is-off, the-universe-must-be-broken feeling when we get lost like this? Does God have God's own version of "a place for everything and everything in its place," that's more about every person being safe and nourished and free? Or as Isaiah puts it "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit." I think this might be a thing.

Can you imagine if we could translate our desire to know where our things are – to fully trust that things don't just disappear into portals we cannot see – into a deep longing for the world as God desires it to be? If we were as uneasy when people are going hungry as we are when we can't find our keys? If we were as diligent about seeking out righteousness as we are about keeping our tools in order? What could the world be like if we made the effort to turn on all the lights and sweep out the corruption and cruelty and deception covering up the suffering of the vulnerable and innocent? How far are we willing to hike into the wilderness to seek out the ones who have been led astray or banished from the good pastures?

Conversely, what does it do to your heart to understand that when you are wandering, making questionable choices, compromising in ways you know are wrong, neglecting the things you know make life better, God is uneasy, searching high and low, trying to figure out where you could have gotten to, not resting until you are found and returned to your proper place? Can you imagine being that precious? Because you are. You are irreplaceable. You are not a spare part; you are a beloved child of God. And together, we are the kit that God has put together to bring love and beauty and justice and wholeness to the whole world, each of us playing our part. It matters if you are at your place at the Table or not. When you are missing, things aren't quite right. When anyone is missing, God goes looking. Let's let ourselves be found. Hallelujah and Amen!