

Lost and Found



*Matthew 18:10-14; Luke
15:1-10*

Year C Proper 19

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	1st Tax Collector - a former colleague of Matthew's who is persuaded to go listen to Jesus preach	▲		▲		
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	▲		■		▲
▲	2nd Tax Collector - another former colleague of Matthew's who has been getting really sick of his life as a hated tax collector	▲		▲		▲
▲	Pharisee - sent to observe and report on Jesus; very arrogant in his certainties and dismissive of others		▲	▲	▲	
●	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor		●			
●	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲			
▲	Scribe - another agent sent along with the Pharisee, but a little more open to self-doubt and honest curiosity		●	●	▲	
▲	Jesus			■		
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus			▲		●

Scene 1

1st Tax Collector , 2nd Tax Collector , Matthew

{Matthew brings two of his former tax collector friends to hear Jesus preach.}

**1st Tax
Collector**

Are you sure this is a good idea?

Matthew

Trust me. You're going to be amazed by his teaching. It's changed my life. And he's an incredible man. He's so...*[unable to describe Jesus]* so...well, you're just going to have to meet him.

**2nd Tax
Collector**

I'm sure we'll like *him* fine. The question is what he'll think of *us*.

Matthew

What's not to like?

**2nd Tax
Collector**

Have you been retired for so long you've forgotten that the religious leaders hate us? That *everybody* hates us?

**1st Tax
Collector**

You understand we're running a risk just coming out to see this guy, don't you?

Matthew

Don't worry. It'll be fine. Once you meet him, you'll understand why you had nothing to worry about.

**1st Tax
Collector**

Look, it's not just about this "rabbi" or guru of yours, or whatever he is. It's about our place in society. Will he be able to protect us if the crowd decides it's time to beat up another tax collector?

**2nd Tax
Collector**

There was a beating just last week. And I heard a priest was right there witnessing the whole thing and didn't lift a hand to stop it.

Matthew

[suddenly sober] Sorry. I guess maybe I *have* been out of it too long. I'd forgotten. *[bravely]* If anyone tries to mess with you, they'll have to go through me first. And my companions will stand by me, too. I promise you that.

**2nd Tax
Collector**

Good enough for me. Let's go see this miracle worker of yours!

**1st Tax
Collector**

All right. He'd better be worth it!

Scene 2

Judas , Pharisee , Phillip , Scribe

{A large crowd consisting mostly of societal outcasts, but also including a Pharisee and a Scribe, waits for Jesus to arrive.}

Pharisee *[sternly to Judas]* Hey, you! Are you one of the organizers?

Judas Yes, sir. We both are.

Pharisee Then why aren't you doing something about this crowd?

Phillip *[looking over the crowd and replying in puzzled innocence]* What's wrong with the crowd? It's one of the best we've had this month.

Scribe The best?

Pharisee Don't you mean, the worst?

Phillip *[still not getting it]* Oh, we've had worse, believe me! Sometimes just two or three show up. *[to Judas]* Isn't that right?

Judas *[knowing full well what the Pharisee and Scribe are talking about]* I don't think the size of this crowd is what concerns our distinguished guests.

Phillip Well, then what?

Scribe *[angrily]* Are you blind? Do you have no moral sense?

Pharisee Just look at them! Drunks, prostitutes, tax collectors: the scum of the earth!

Scribe Is that who your leader prefers associating with?

Pharisee We already know he eats and drinks with them.

Scribe He goes into their homes!

Judas He associates with anybody who will hear him, and he goes wherever he can find them.

Phillip And we've got some respectable followers, too. Like Joanna, the wife of Chuza.

Scribe *[nervously]* Chuza, the manager of Herod's household?

Phillip That's right!

Pharisee *[not intimidated]* Well then, let us hope that this little gathering of sinners you've organized will not in any way upset Chuza - or Herod.

Scene 3

1st Tax Collector , 2nd Tax Collector , Jesus , Joanna , Matthew , Pharisee , Scribe

{Jesus arrives and preaches his sermon. After his opening paragraph, Matthew and his friends, the Pharisee and the Scribe, and Joanna start discussing it. Note: the Crowd can be played by everybody without a part in this scene, or even by everybody if there aren't enough extras.}

Jesus As I look out on this crowd, I suspect that some might call you sinners, low-lives, and wonder what right you have to hear the Word of God today. But I say to you: God loves you more than he does the righteous!

Crowd *[The crowd ad libs various cheers and affirmations. For example: "Amen!" "God be praised!" etc.]*

Pharisee *[to the Scribe]* He flaunts it!

2nd Tax Collector *[to Matthew]* Wow, you were right!

Jesus Who among you, if you had a hundred sheep and one of them got lost, would not leave the other ninety-nine behind in the wilderness to go search for the one that needed you most?

Crowd *[The crowd ad libs various cheers and affirmations. For example: "That's right!" "We would!" etc.]*

Scribe *[to anyone who will hear]* Wait a minute, that's not true at all!

1st Tax Collector *[to Matthew]* He's right, you know. It doesn't make sense.

Jesus And what woman, if she had ten pieces of silver and lost one, would not suspend all her other household chores to search for it, and when she found it, would not call all her friends and neighbors together to celebrate its finding?

Crowd *[The crowd ad libs various cheers and affirmations. For example: "Smart woman" "Good for her!" etc.]*

Joanna Wait, what?

2nd Tax Collector *[sincerely, to Matthew]* Is he being serious?

Jesus In just this way, the angels in heaven rejoice whenever a single sinner repents!

Crowd *[The crowd roars with the biggest cheers yet. "Hurray!" "Praise God!" etc.]*

{Jesus continues preaching, but the religious representatives, the tax collectors, Joanna, and Matthew start talking on their own.}

Pharisee *[to Matthew]* You! You're one of them, right? What do you have to say for yourself?

Matthew I say nothing for myself. What did you think of the rabbi?

Pharisee That he is a fount of errors. God does not love the wicked more than the righteous, any more than any good shepherd would abandon his whole flock in the wilderness to go searching for one stray!

Matthew Well, it's a parable.

1st Tax Collector Yes, but in a parable, don't you teach a spiritual lesson through an earthly example? In this case, the earthly example is just wrong.

Matthew The rabbi's teaching is often difficult, but it always makes sense in the end. Let me try to find someone who can explain it better. Or wait until he's finished and you can talk to him personally.

Joanna Matthew, we should be honest. There's really something not quite right about the parable. It's the same with one about the woman. Have you ever heard of anybody, man or woman, inviting their friends to come celebrate the finding of some lost money?

Scribe What I don't understand is how the crowd doesn't see this. Look at them! They're eating up every word he speaks!

Pharisee It's because they minds are in darkness. *[Pointedly]* The darkness of *sin!* *[to the Scribe]* Let's go. There's obviously nothing more to see here.

{The Pharisee and Scribe exit.}

1st Tax Collector *[to Matthew]* Well, you promised us a good show, and at least it was that. But I don't think I'm likely to hear anything useful from your rabbi. *[to 2nd Tax Collector]* Come on, let's go, too.

2nd Tax Collector *[to Matthew]* I'm sorry. I'm sure he means a lot to you.

Matthew It's all right. Let's get together again soon and catch up.

1st Tax Collector Sure. Come on by the office some time. You can help us out. It's the busy time of year, you know, and I'm sure you haven't forgotten all your old skills.

Matthew I'll come, but I won't be able to help. I've given up that life.

2nd Tax Collector For him.

Matthew Yes.

2nd Tax Collector *[to Joanna]* And you: are you really the wife of Herod's steward?

Joanna Yes. I was the co-steward of Herod's house along with my husband.

2nd Tax Collector You had it made! Why did you leave that life? Did people hate you for serving Herod?

Joanna I'm sure many did.

2nd Tax Collector Is that why -

1st Tax Collector *[to 2nd Tax Collector, interrupting]* We should get going.

2nd Tax Collector Of course, of course. *[to Matthew]* Don't forget to drop by! *[to Joanna]* And if you'd like to come along with him, we'd be honored.

{The tax collectors exit. By this time, the sermon is over, too, and Jesus comes over to Matthew and Joanna.}

Jesus Well, what did you think?

Matthew Um, that was a good sermon.

Jesus Did you think so?

Matthew Almost the whole crowd loved it.

Jesus Yes, they did. Perhaps some will decide to join us.

Matthew *[a little wistfully]* That would be wonderful.

Joanna Rabbi, can I ask you something?

Jesus Certainly.

Joanna *[trying tactfully to get to the subject of his sermon's inaccuracies]* What did you do before you started your ministry?

Jesus I was a carpenter. I learned from my father, and took over the business when he died.

Joanna Did you ever tend sheep?

Jesus Never.

Joanna Have you ever kept a house?

Jesus No. We live like the birds of the air, as you know, and before that, I lived with my mother.

Joanna Well...the thing is...you told a couple of parables about a shepherd and a housewife at the beginning of your sermon.

Jesus Yes?

{Joanna is too timid to go on. Matthew jumps in to try and save her.}

Matthew Some of the crowd thought they weren't quite...right.

Jesus Ah! Who in the crowd thought this?

Matthew Well, there was this Pharisee, and a Scribe.

Jesus I can see why they wouldn't!

Matthew Yes, well, there were others.

Jesus I should hope so! Who else?

Matthew Well...I brought a couple of friends. Fellow tax collectors from when I did that. And they found some problems with the parables and left.

Jesus I'm sorry about that. You were hoping to rescue them, weren't you?

Matthew They were such good friends back in the day, and they seem so unhappy. And I just wish you had preached some other sermon today, *any* other. Something that would have - I don't know - impressed them more.

Jesus Do you remember the day you joined us?

Matthew I'll never forget it.

Jesus Do you remember what I preached that day?

Matthew *[after a long pause]* Um...No! I'm sorry. I can't remember.

Jesus And yet: you joined, and will never forget that day! Be comforted. The sheep may wander far and wide, but the Shepherd always finds them!

Scene 4

Pharisee , Scribe

{The Scribe and the Pharisee walk together back to the town.}

Scribe So, what do you think?

Pharisee *[arrogantly]* I think we have nothing to worry about.

Scribe *[worried]* That's what you're going to report?

Pharisee *[confidently]* Yes. I'll report that the man himself is a lunatic who makes no sense in his sermons, and that the only followers he'll ever attract are those dimwitted enough to swallow his tripe.

Scribe Chuza is no dimwit.

Pharisee All he's doing is taking a flyer on a longshot. It's a bet he'll lose, and he won't be very troubled by it.

Scribe I think it's more than that. His wife is a follower!

Pharisee Yes, but did you notice she also criticized the sermon? If she was ever a true believer, I suspect she's having second thoughts now. *[looking closely at the Scribe for the first time]* You're really worried, aren't you? Look, you must agree that the only people who will ever follow this guy are the dregs of society.

Scribe Yes, I see that, but I also see that there are more and more dregs every day these days.

Pharisee True, but I'm sure the authorities will soon take care of that.

Scribe By "authorities" you mean the Romans.

Pharisee Yes.

Scribe I think - *[looks around to make sure no one else on the road is eavesdropping]* - I think it's been getting worse *because* of the Romans.

Pharisee What are you saying? You and I have done quite well under their rule.

Scribe Yes, but for every one of us that has done better, there are ninety-nine who have done worse.

Pharisee So what? That's just the way of the world. "To those that have shall be given."

Scribe But don't you see? That means that the number of people who might follow this Jesus or some other charismatic leader is growing every day. Soon, they're going to outnumber us.

{The Pharisee stops in his tracks, unable to speak, stunned by the thought.}

Scene 5

2nd Tax Collector , Joanna , Matthew

{As Matthew and Joanna clean up the site, one of Matthew's friends reenters.}

2nd Tax Collector Matthew?

Matthew *[happy to see him, but curious why he's back]* Hello! What are you doing back here? Did you lose something?

2nd Tax Collector I thought I'd try losing *myself*. To see if I could be found.

Matthew You mean...?

2nd Tax Collector Where do I sign to join up?

Matthew *[tapping a hand over his heart]* Right here, my friend, right here! But I don't understand. I thought you hated the rabbi's sermon.

2nd Tax Collector I do like my numbers to add up, or thought I did. My numbers have actually been great this year, but I've been miserable. I finally decided...that instead of being a clever and prosperous - but hated - tax collector, I'd rather be a simple sheep whose shepherd loved it so much he'd leave the rest of the flock behind just to go rescue it.

Joanna But what will you do when the shepherd leaves *you* to go rescue the next lost sheep?

2nd Tax Collector I don't know. Maybe I'll go with him. Anyway, I'll understand. If another sheep needs him more than me, he'll have my leave to go find it.

Matthew Now you're talking like one of the crew!

2nd Tax Collector Am I really one of the crew? Just like that?

Matthew Just like that!

2nd Tax Collector So, what happens now?

Joanna It's obvious. According to the second parable, we call the rest of the crew together and throw a party!

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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