

There is a time to search and a time to lose.

When something is lost there are two possible outcomes from searching. You either find it or you don't.

If you find it – just how satisfying is that???

My father owned a compass. This was quite novel, because to be honest I never saw him use the thing.

I can clearly visualize the scene in our house in Chester, when Dad lost the compass. We literally re-enacted the parable of the lost coin. We looked everywhere and he wouldn't stop searching for the dratted thing, because we couldn't go on holiday without it.

Had I known my Old Testament better, I might have quoted today's line from Ecclesiastes to him – there is a time to search and a time to lose / or stop / or cut your losses – (take your pick of translation).

He would not stop searching and eventually he found it, at the back of his bureau.

Then, like the woman who found her coin and the shepherd who found the sheep, we rejoiced. Being a life long Christian and lay-preacher, somewhat unsurprisingly (and I can hear my father saying) "rejoice with me, for the compass that was lost is now found". He still didn't use it on holiday.

Two outcomes from the searching – you either find it, or you don't.

But there is a third possibility you just go on searching and searching and searching. Our line from Ecclesiastes warns against this. There is a time to search and time to lose.

Accept it and move on. But our two parables seem to infer that God doesn't stop searching.

The point of the stories is to tell the grumbling Pharisees just how heaven celebrates when someone lost to God's Kingdom is found and saved. Jesus' parables reveal God's character and the shepherd doesn't stop until the lost sheep is found.

What are we to make of this? On the one hand, it seems common sense that sometimes we give up our search and stop wasting time. On the other we have God who doesn't give up searching.

I guess at a common sense level to do with the ordinary of the day to day, deciding that something is lost and to accept it makes sense. One Christmas an iPhone went missing in our house. Life as we know it stood still. We searched everywhere, even going back to places we had visited. Then, we followed the instructions from Ecclesiastes and decided it was lost.

And bought another phone.

You can guess what happened next. We found the original!

But I also think there is a spiritual time to stop searching and lose – in order to win.

*Saint Augustine states "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."*

That restlessness in everyone becomes a search for the something that will satisfy our need.

Way back in 1662, Blaise Pascal wrote about the emptiness within describing it as an infinite abyss that could only be filled with an infinite and immutable object – God himself.

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To put it in modern terms, we all have a God shaped Hole

I was at college with a chap Murray McBride who wrote a little evangelistic tract book called the God shaped hole (pictures by Jo Ashcroft). It explores in simple terms why people are searching and that they will go on searching until they find Christ.

But in order to accept Christ we have to surrender. Stop searching for something else, or something as well as Christ. We have to lose the self-centred desire that keeps us searching and accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.

I have a friend called \*\*\*\* who is a teacher. He is gentle, kind, funny, lovable man; also a talented musician. He was a member of the church. He played in the worship band. He was in the men's group. But he was still searching. So we had a conversation. It became clear that his knowledge of faith was in his head but not his heart. He was still sort of sitting on the fence – not really committed. He was still searching but didn't know for what and I recognised it was time to commit, the search was over.

\*\*\*\* I said. You know all you need to know. You are sitting on the fence, but both legs are dangling down the same side. You need to hop off and make that commitment to Jesus Christ.

I can tell you he did and did not look back, he realised the search was over once he had made that commitment.

He has grown in faith and Christian maturity. I heard recently he has trained in music therapy so combining his love of music, with caring for young people and of course living his faith.

But I think of another guy called \*\*\*\*\* who also needs all he need to know – but he won't commit and consequently, he keeps searching.

Are you still searching, or do you need to hop off the fence and make the commitment to Jesus Christ?

Many of us will have done, perhaps all of us so what does this mean for us if we **have** come to Christ. We've no reason now to search??

However my observation is that there are Christians who still seem to be searching hard for a peace and love and joy that is supposed to be our experience in Christ but eludes us. And the only way we know is to work hard and earn the peace, deserve the joy, find the blessings we long for.

Years ago at a communion service for ordinands in Blackburn Diocese, the Bishops Chaplain surprised me by playing a U2 song "I still haven't found what I'm looking for". The song stayed with me. Written and sung by Bono, the lyrics have a plaintive, haunting refrain. Whatever experiences he has had, he still hasn't found what he's looking for and there are Christians who might admit somewhat guiltily, they can feel that way too.

The answer is in today's lesson. We have to stop searching and lose the idea that we can find the Shalom; the deep, blissful, joyful peace and wholeness we seek. You can't earn it, work for it, find it or get it by your own effort.

It's freely given and what you have to experience is receiving it.

I think, during Lent which begins on Wednesday it's time for us diligent, faithful, hard working Christians who expect to work for their grace and peace and blessing to stop searching in order to receive.....simply by faith.

Lent is traditionally a time to be penitent (can't argue with that) and do good and abstain etc etc, this year I want us to experience something of the Kingdom of heaven.

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My prayer is that we can stop searching and start receiving. My prayer is one spoken by St.Paul to the Ephesians.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.