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Lost & Found

I borrowed a book from the library earlier this week. Nothing unusual about that - I am an avid reader.

It was a book by Ralph Waldo Emerson, entitled *Friendship and other essays*, and I found it heavy going and not particularly illuminating. Nothing unusual about that, either! What was unusual was my discovery of an unusual addition to the words. Losing interest in the text, I leafed through to the end of the book to discover two banknotes tucked into the laminated cover of the final page.

This random discovery was made even more unusual by the denomination of the notes – an enticingly juicy total of £30.

My imagination immediately ran riot. Had someone folded this money into the book because they had received some change from a purchase and had forgotten their purse? In which case this was a serious loss.

Or was it a quixotic person, playing a game of 'Pay Forward'?

Or was it a morality test, to see if the discoverer would 'do the right thing' and try to track down the owner?

Or was it someone living with dementia, who had little idea of what they were doing but whose mind found comfort and meaning by neatly inserting banknotes inside a transparent envelope?

I related my discovery to one of our befriended and it triggered a powerful memory for her. Many years ago when she lived near Manchester, she lost a £5 note when out shopping with her daughter.

She related to me in great detail the agony of her loss– she had been sure she had the banknote firmly clutched in hand while she was managing her shopping and the said 7-year old daughter, and her heart sank at this significant loss. This was 60 years ago and a significant sum of money!

She all but gave up on the spot, but encouraged by her daughter, and offering desperate pleas to Almighty God, they retraced their steps and to her amazement they found the fiver, lying unclaimed on the pavement.

My friend could still remember exactly how she felt, both before and after the recovery and in particular, she easily recalled the fervency of her prayer. It happened 6 decades years ago, but she relived the moment as she told me her tale, and still thanks God for that answer.

I then told her one of my stories of loss. It was back in my running days, and happened at Eartham Woods. I had just got back to the car with my two dogs, ready to cool down and set off back for home when to my horror, I discovered I had lost my car keys. They had fallen out of my running bag somewhere along an up-hill down-dale 16-mile circuit that I habitually ran in those days, around Houghton Forest and Bignor Hill.

It was a long route, and as it took me the best part of 3 hours to run it, would I be able to locate these keys?

I was tired and knew I couldn't run the whole circuit again, and what was worse, it was now late afternoon and the shadows were lengthening. The two dogs with me were no help. "Fetch!" I told them, but their uncomprehending canine gaze just reinforced the feeling I had, of being a total idiot.

I cursed myself for my carelessness. This was before the days of mobile phones and anyway I was standing by the only vehicle our family owned, in the car park at Eartham Woods, not reachable by public transport, so there was no calling for rescue from my long-suffering wife - or anyone else, for that matter.

You can guess the rest. Uttering urgent prayers, I set off with low expectations to retrace my steps, hoping the keys had not been kicked under leaves or been thrown off the path into the undergrowth. I guessed that the keys must have fallen out sooner than later, and so it proved- after only 10 minutes there they were, and the dogs were as thankful as I was, as they too wanted to get home. Their eyes brightened and tails wagged as we turned back to the car.

Oh what a fool I had felt! I had savagely reproached myself. How wonderful to be spared the consequences of a permanent loss! What gratitude! And I made promises to God and myself never to repeat such stupid neglect.

Jesus of Nazareth told stories of loss in Luke 15.

One is of a woman who lost a silver coin. We know that the coin was worth far more than its metal value, because it was one of 10 that symbolised her status as a married woman and indeed, as a respectable married woman of status. A modern equivalence would be to lose a wedding ring.

Like me she searched high and low until she found the missing object, and rejoiced, so much so that she threw a party for friends and neighbours!

Why is this? Is it that, once lost, a valued item can no longer be taken for granted? Does it assume a greater importance to us, once lost and once recovered?

Further, do we think that the strong and lasting feelings engendered in us by the loss (and the self-blame!) followed by the relief and the release from tension once found, marks us in such a way that however trivial, the moment becomes imbued with great significance?

I ran that same route in Eartham many times afterwards, but it is that time, that moment, that stands out in my memory. Since then I have used that set of keys many times- and still do, as I have the same car, over 20 years later, and think nothing much about that usage.

And after all, the spending power of my friend's £5 note was no greater *after* she recovered it than it had been *before* she lost it.

Yet somehow, it had become more precious.



We can see the same set of emotions in the story of the Loving Father, also in Luke 15. The older, dyspeptic brother complains to his father about all the fuss and bother over his wastrel younger brother's return, and moans about the welcome home party; but then the Father says this,

“ But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

Hmm.

We have all been lost and we are all found, and can be found. Sometimes we keep on getting lost, and get found again... and again... and again. Neither the Loving Father nor the Good Shepherd gives up on us.

And sometimes it is we who are the seekers, seeking the lost- the shepherd for his lost sheep; the woman for her silver coin; my friend for her £5 note, and me for my keys.

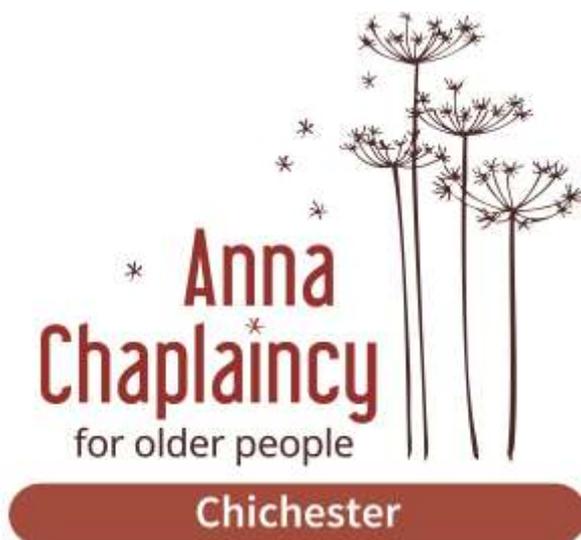
I don't understand it really, but somehow, the recovery after being lost makes these objects and symbols - and us - all the more precious and valuable to our Loving Father.... and somehow, wonderfully, we're always coming home.

The book? Well, I went into the library this afternoon, and told my tale, and the nice people there very much enjoyed my story - you can be sure I told it with suitable embellishments - and promised they would contact the previous borrower, and meanwhile stuck the money in an envelope so that if unclaimed it will become a donation to library funds.

And me? Well, I said a wistful farewell to those two banknotes as they slid out of sight... they suddenly became considerably more valuable as they disappeared!

[Love and blessings, David](#)

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