**The Revd Dr Ian McIntosh, Director of Mission and Ministry, reflects on Luke 15.8-10\* for Mothering Sunday, 30th March.**

One of my favourite children's books is ‘We're Going on a Bear Hunt’ by Michael Rosen. It tells the story of a group of five children facing up to their fears of bears, portrayed through an adventure where they try to find a bear. They go through oozing mud, wavy tall grass and scary forests. In the end, they do find the bear, but they're so scared they run back home, chased by the disconsolate bear who only wants to play. The book is renowned for a famous catchphrase: ‘We're going on a bear hunt; we're going to catch a big one. It's a beautiful day. We're not scared.’

Like all good stories, there echoes here of the Christian story, especially during Lent, of our having to face up to our fears by tackling them head on. ‘We have to go through them,’ is a refrain in that story. But what I especially love about this book is the sense of persistence on the part of the children to find what they're looking for. And it's this persistence which echoes and mirrors for me, the persistence which God shows in searching us out as God's beloved children. Or, if we were to alter the refrain from the book, God is in the business of going for a ‘I'm searching for the lost’ hunt. In Luke's Gospel, there are plenty of these searching stories of the lengths which God goes to to find the lost, and the subsequent joy when the lost are found.

On this Mothering Sunday, I've deliberately chosen the story of the woman who lights a lamp and sweeps a house to find one of her lost coins, as an example of God who searches and searches. The lectionary invites us into the stories about men finding things; a shepherd and the prodigal son being found. But sandwiched in between them is this story, which celebrates the persistence of a widow searching for a lost coin. The care reflected later in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus is described as like a mother hen caring for her chicks, in his love and lament over Jerusalem.

Here is God, pictured using female imagery and as a woman, showing us the lengths by which God goes to search for us. The God who notices that we’re lost and endures much to find us, walking through the wilderness. Jesus being ridiculed, being misunderstood, but Jesus going into the forgotten corners as part of embodying God's love, are all part of God's searching out of humanity that we might be found, loved and cherished, all part of the story of a God who searches for the lost.

So today, we want to give thanks for that love of a God who notices us, searches us out, and rejoices in what God has found. And on this Mothering Sunday, we thank God for those who have and continue to show us love, for those who've been a parent to us, a carer for us, for those who might have adopted us or looked after us. We thank God for all those who, as in all acts of love, mirror the God who persistently and joyfully searches us out.

Let us pray. Loving and generous God, we thank you that you search out the lost and rejoice to find us. Nourish and nurture this Lent with a sense of your persistence in finding us. And help us, we pray, to love others in that light, to search and to work with you to restore and repair. Thank you for all who love, nurture, and care for us this day. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

\*the Gospel reading differs slightly from the lectionary; this is intentional.