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Think of the last time you lost something. What are those things we commonly lose? ...

Several people decided to do a bit of research and discern the top five most commonly lost objects. They searched online and went around town investigating the lost and found bins.¹ Guess what five lost objects mostly commonly show up in the bins:

1. keys
2. USB flash drive
3. mobile phone
4. sunglasses
5. gloves

Recently it felt as though I had lost a week, for the flu sent me into a strange fever-ridden fogginess that blurred time. By the time I came out of it, I had lost five or six days, along with all the plans I had hoped to accomplish. Things had happened in the world during those days of which I had little awareness—the most shocking to hear was the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut. The lives of 20 children and

6 adults have been lost, which, of course, can never be found.

If this loss isn't enough, other school threats were made this past week: a man walked into a school in Virginia carrying a 2x4 labeled "high-powered rifle" as a way to raise awareness of safety in the schools.²

A man living across from an elementary school in Indiana threatened to "kill as many people as he could before police stopped him." In Tennessee police arrested a 19-year-old who posted on Facebook, "go in on a rampage, kinda like the school shooting were that one guy killed some teachers and a bunch of students."³

The people who made these threats may not have actually meant any harm, but I think they point to something we've lost: we've lost our way.

When we find ourselves living a world where children don't feel safe at school, we've lost our way.

When we live in a world where we think violence is the solution to our problems, we've lost our way.

When we live in a world where we have to argue whether everyone should have access to health care, we've lost our way.

When we live in a world where people use derogatory labels based on the color of skin or sexual orientation, we've lost our way.

When we live in a world where those with power and wealth make unwise decisions on behalf of the poor, we've lost our way, which is not much different than the days when the prophet Micah lived. It appears they had lost their way as well, for Micah spoke out against those in power.

The economy had been strong, with plenty of wealth amongst those in power. Military defenses were on the rise. There had been several decades of peace where the rich became richer and the poor became poorer, and there was a false sense of security. (Sound familiar?) Micah warned that their way of living could not last forever; God was not happy with the way people were being treated, for As Micah suggested, the “wealthy are full of violence” (6:12).

And then their world began to fall apart as the nearby Assyrian nation overtook their land. The prosperity and security began to crumble around them, and soon everyone had lost their way. And yet, Micah spoke of hope—of dwelling securely on the earth in peace.

Six hundred years later when Mary and Elizabeth met to share stories about the upcoming births of their children, I imagine the two women may have also felt that those in power had lost their way as they wondered when peace might arrive. When Mary sang her song, what is often called the Magnificat, I imagine she longed for the time reflected in her words: when God would lift up the poor, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty.

In the midst of sharing their dreams and hopes for a better world for their unborn children, Luke's Gospel tells us that suddenly the child in Elizabeth moved.

I imagine Elizabeth saying, “Oh my. What's he doing in there? Did you see the baby move? He responded to your voice. It's almost as though he

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was leaping for joy. Put your hand here, and feel him move.”

“My, your child is certainly active. Just imagine what he will be like when he’s born. He will probably never sit still!”

“That’s what I’m afraid of. I mean, the world is so unstable now. What future does a child have in today’s world? The world seems so lost. I just hope my child doesn’t get lost in the midst of all the confusion.”

Two thousand years later, what would Mary or Elizabeth think about Jesus? Would he appear to be lost in the midst of our society that celebrates consumerism more than Jesus? As we light this final Advent candle, one representing love, have we found what Mary longed for, or would she suggest that we have lost the meaning of Christmas?

Actually, I’m not so sure that we’ve *lost* the meaning of Christmas, but that it’s been *stolen* by a world that says we express our love by giving bigger and better stuff each year—by a consumer society that says we find ourselves by finding the biggest gift.

GPS Jesus
December 23, 2012

I think this idea of a stolen Christmas is reflected in the outbreak of stolen baby Jesus figures the past several years. Just imagine walking past a church, admiring the beautiful outdoor decorations. There are the shepherds visiting the nativity scene, along with angels and wise men. The animals seem calm as they sit in the snow-covered scenes. Mary and Joseph look lovingly into the manger used as a crib for a—wait a minute! No baby? Where’s the baby Jesus? You cannot have a nativity scene without the baby!

Back in 1953 Sargent Joe Friday during an episode of *Dragnet* was called to solve what may have been the first missing Jesus case. Unable to solve the crime, he told the priest to have Christmas without the baby Jesus. When all seemed lost, a young boy showed up with the baby Jesus riding in his wagon. The boy explained, “I asked for a wagon for Christmas and said that Baby Jesus would be the first to ride in it.”

The past several years baby Jesus figures have increasingly come up missing all over the world.

Three churches in Shawano County, Wisconsin

Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-45
Crossroads Christian Church

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discovered this past week that baby Jesus was missing from their outdoor nativity scenes.⁴

In Menominee, Michigan, “Mary and Joseph stare at a blank pile of hay, instead of baby Jesus in the manger,” the figure now replaced with a ransom note.⁵

Even in the Manchester airport in the UK, a place that one would think has lots of security, baby Jesus is nowhere to be found this year.⁶

One security firm now offers a solution to the missing Jesus, but only if you plan ahead and insert their tiny GPS (Global Positioning System) tracking device into the Jesus. It will send an alarm if the baby is moved, and if the figure does disappear, one can log onto a computer and track the baby’s location.

When we live a world that needs a GPS Jesus, have we lost our way? Or maybe, we live in a world that needs a GPS Jesus, for I tend to think of Jesus as a different kind of GPS—God’s Passionate Salvation. God sent Jesus into the world to guide us, to direct us toward the wondrous love and forgiveness that God offers. God has been sending that message to the world for thousands of years, but sometimes it seems to get lost in the hustle and bustle of life. In the midst of all the messages that try to get you lost, may you find your way this Christmas though GPS Jesus, for God passionately loves you and offers this as the best Christmas gift ever.

¹ “The 5 Mostly Commonly Lost items,” December 7, 2010, www.zomm.com/blog/news/top-5-most-commonly-lost-items-1525/

² Doug Stanglin, “Man charged in rifle stunt at Sandy Hook school in Va.” www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/20/sandy-hook-school-virginia-man-arrested/1782191/

³ Russell Goldman, “Schools Face Threats Nationwide Following Sandy Hook Shooting,” Dec. 20, 2012, abcnews.go.com/US/schools-face-threats-nationwide-sandy-hook-shooting/story?id=18019370#UNN_jeRkyAg

⁴ www.postcrescent.com/article/20121218/APC0101/312180360/-Hey-baby-Jesus-gone-Figurines-stolen-correct-nativity-scenes-

⁵ www.fox11online.com/dpp/news/local/north_counties/baby-jesus-stolen-from-nativity-scene

⁶ menmedia.co.uk/manchestereveningnews/news/s/1596013_taken-off-baby-jesus-nativity-figure-stolen-from-manchester-airport-display