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"Lost and Found"

Jeremiah 4:11-12; 22-28 Luke 15:1-10 | Timothy 1:12-17

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 4:11-12;22-28

In today's passage from Jeremiah he delivers a wakeup call to apathetic Judah who may look stupid and foolish, but is resourceful when it comes to doing evil. If they heed the wakeup call, in the end Jeremiah promises redemption.

INTRODUCTIN TO LUKE 15:1-10

Jesus said he came to seek and to save the lost. In today's gospel lesson we are going to look at 2 of the 3 parables Jesus told about seeking the lost so they might be found. Would you please stand for the reading of the gospel from Luke 15:1-10

Let's Pray. .Lord thank you that you are a searching, caring, loving God. Thank you that are not willing that any should perish but that all could come to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with us this morning as we seek to come to a greater understanding of what these two parables mean. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Several months ago I did the unimaginable. I lost my cell phone. I was lost without my phone ... that was lost. The last time I had it was when I stopped at a gas station to go inside and get a Diet Dr. Pepper. When I got home it was gone. I got a flashlight and searched every cranny of the car. Then I thought maybe someone took it out of my car when I went inside or maybe it fell out of my car when I got out. I called the gas station but no one turned one in. (as if) Finally I reported the lost phone to AT&T. I had insurance and they sent me another one. But it cost me.

A few days after I got my replacement phone I went to clean out a bag that I use to transport cold drinks and frozen meals back and forth between Baytown and Houston. There was something wet inside the bag. When I took it to the sink and turned it upside down guess what fell out of a front pocket on the bag? My cell phone. It had slid off the seat and into the pocket of that bag that was in the floor of the passenger seat.

I called AT&T to see if I could just return the replacement phone which I had only had for a few days. But they insisted that I had to send them the one I had reported lost and use the replacement.

I wasn't as frantic as the woman in Jesus parable' who lost her coin because.... I had insurance. We don't know why the woman was so concerned about one

lost coin. Perhaps it was necessary for the woman to find it out of economic necessity; or perhaps because it was one of ten silver coins linked together by a chain that formed the necklace of the headdress of a married woman, something like our wedding ring today.

The point is that Jesus uses an image of someone who in his hearer's ears who was even lower in status than a shepherd to describe GOD! Jesus uses this story to say that his Heavenly Father is like a woman who lost a coin. God is a seeking and searching God who won't stop until that which is lost is found.

In the second parable Jesus compares God to a shepherd who notices when one tiny lamb wanders from the flock. Two thousand years ago in Palestine, shepherds were barely above women as far as status went. But neither shepherds nor women's testimony was admissible in a court of law.

God is like a shepherd who is willing to get His hands dirty bringing that lamb home. One little lamb goes astray, and God is willing to leave all the nice lambs that behaved themselves and obeyed the rules and went to church every Sunday...to go through the briars and the brambles until that one lost lamb is found. Actually the point Jesus is trying to make to the religious snobs to whom he is telling this story is that they TOO should be seeking lost ones like that.

Sheep are not the brightest creatures on earth. Sheep are dumb, but in many ways we are even dumber. No sheep has ever been charged with abusing its own lamb. No sheep has ever been charged with stealing from a neighbor or with murder. Sheep don't knowingly abuse their own bodies or minds. They don't hate other sheep that are of a different color or economic level or religion. Sheep only have one or two ways they can become lost. We humans have thousands, and we seem to be inventing new ones every day.

Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. My guess is that all of us feel or get lost from time to time. Some of us have hurts that were inflicted on us early in our lives, and those hurts still cause us pain. They may even cause us to lash out at others or to act self-destructively. We may not even know why we are doing some of the dumb things we do. Sometimes we don't seem able to help ourselves. Some get lost by wandering off to check out the grass that's "always greener on the other side." Some get lost because of an accident. I know you may find this hard to believe, but there are even some times when some make intentional choices that cut us off from God. That is why we need a shepherd. That is why we need a God who gets His hands dirty and comes to us where we are.

One of the most telling lines of the hymn "Amazing Grace." is the line that says, "I ONCE was lost." Grace understands that God's love seeks and moves toward us even before we do any seeking or reaching out to God. Grace says that even

WHEN we're unworthy, God reaches out to us. If God waited until we were worthy to reach out to us, or till we made the first move, for many of us God would still be waiting.

The very heart of the Christian message is that God in his fullness sought us out personally in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to seek and to save fools who say in their hearts there is no God. Jesus came to seek and to find sheep who have wandered astray. Jesus came to seek and to find coins that had rolled away. Jesus entered into our world seeking to bring us the message of his love, his care.

Are you feeling lost today? Is life getting you down? Are friends letting you down, family leaving you behind, co-workers shutting you out? There are a thousand ways we can feel lost when we come into this room each week. Like a lost sheep clinging to a cliff, cry your lungs out. Cry out so that the Shepherd God can come to you and rescue you and bring you back into the fold.

If you're too beat to bleat, take comfort in the fact that even a coin who can't make a sound can be found, not because of anything it can do, but because there is a table turning, chair moving God who is like a woman who won't give up until her coin is found. Whether you've ever been lost or whether you have someone you love who is lost right now, it is great comfort that God cares about those who have gone astray and comes looking.

I wasn't looking for God! There was a time in my life when I knew I was lost as to what to do with my life. I knew I needed direction, I just didn't know which one. But then one summer I gave up my lucrative career of selling ladies shoes to put myself through UH to take a summer job teaching music and drama to kids at the Lighthouse for the Blind. That's when the seeking God came looking for me. Through children who couldn't see, God turned on the light to this 19 year old kid who could. I was once was lost but then and NOW am found.

There was a time when I lost something much more precious than an inanimate object like a cell phone. I was in J.C. Penny trying to buy some shoes for Abbey when she was about 5 years old. I turned away from her for just a moment seconds to look at another pair and she was gone. I was frantic. I looked everywhere. I had them call the store manager. They were just about to seal the doors when I saw a bouncing pony tail skipping through the stock room door. Like a little lamb she had gone astray and was having a great time running through the aisles of shoe shelves.

Today we are having a silent auction to raise money so that children won't be lost in the shuffle. The Diana Gray Child Care Center that Church Women United and the Thrift Store supports—and that we support, is a safe place where the parents who are studying at Lee College and other families can leave their children to be cared for knowing that they will be safe and that they will get a

good head start in life. By supporting this Center through today's auction and our Witness and Outreach budget we are helping take care of little lambs Jesus commanded Peter to tend.

Today is the 15th anniversary of the attacks that occurred on September 11th 2001. It is a day of remembering the lost, those who lost their lives on that day. Last night Anne and I watched the story of those events on the History Channel. In addition to the stories of those who were lost there were stories of first responders who searched and searched until they found those who were survivors.

Yesterday, Anne and I went to see the movie Sully. It is the story of the pilot and copilot that had to make an emergency landing of their passenger jet in the Hudson River when both engines failed because of a flock of geese were sucked into the engines right after takeoff. All 155 souls aboard that plane survived. At the end of the investigation that followed the pilot was commended for being a hero. The pilot said, "I disagree. Every one of us, all of the 155 souls on board, the first responders, the ferry captains and crew, were the heroes that day."

Jesus came seeking out tax collectors and sinners because he came to do anything to gather in the scattered, to find the lost, to save those in need of rescue. No price is too high to pay to restore even just one. Grace is the point of these parables; that's the revelation Jesus wants the Pharisees and us to see. If sheep and coins are worthy of seeking out and rejoicing over, then how much more are wayward sons and daughters, tax collectors and sinners who ONCE were lost, but now thanks to a seeking God and God's people are ... found.

Let's pray.

Ever seeking God, thank you for seeking and finding us. Thank you for not giving up. Thank you for restoring us when we stray. Thank you for the GREAT REJOICING in heaven on the day that we were found.

We pray for those who have strayed. for those we perceive to be lost We pray for those you have yet to call, that we might join you in partnership and be the avenues through which your call can come. We want to share the love of Jesus we have received. Hear us as we lift our concerns for those who need your healing power your comforting presence and your saving grace. This we pray in the name of Jesus, the light of the world, the Prince of Peace, the Good Shepherd, our friend and our helper. Amen.