

Sermon – Lost and Found

Sunday, March 31, 2019

Scripture Readings – Joshua 5:9-12, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

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Our first scripture reading is Joshua 5:9-12. Here we read about the transition of the Israelites from being lost in the wilderness to finding their home in the Promised Land. After 40 years of searching and coming into their own, this joyous homecoming has finally arrived and is symbolized by the celebratory Passover meal. May our hearts and minds be open to the hearing and understanding of God's Word.

*9 The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is Luke 15:1-3 and 11-32. This chapter presents three parables around the theme of "lost and found." The parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep focus on how the woman and the shepherd seek diligently until that which is lost has been found. In the parable of the lost son, the young man finds himself before returning home. In all three stories, there is great rejoicing and a celebration when that which has been lost is found! Hear now the word of God as recorded by Luke.

*1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So Jesus told them this parable:*

*11 "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property*

*with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 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.'" Amen.*

The title of the sermon: *Lost and Found*

*Text: ...for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. Luke 15:24*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, thank you for rejoicing whenever one of your beloved children finds themselves and comes home to you. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*In the early dry dark of an October's Saturday evening, the neighborhood children are playing hide and seek, so writes Robert Fulgham in his book All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. I would like to share his reflections on this childhood game found in the chapter entitled "Hide and Seek."*

*Did you have a kid in your neighborhood who always hid so well, nobody could find him? We did. After a while we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up, all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad back because he wasn't playing the game the way it was supposed to be played. There's hiding and there's finding, we'd say. And he'd say it was hide and seek, not hide and give up, and we'd all yell about who made the rules and who cared about who, anyway, and how we wouldn't play with him anymore if he didn't get it straight... and things like that. No matter what, though, the next time he would hide too well again. He's probably still hidden somewhere, for all I know."*

*As I write this, the neighborhood game goes on, and there is a kid under a pile of leaves in the yard just below my window. He has been there a long time now, and everybody else is found and they are about to give up on him over at the base. I considered going out to the base and telling them where he is hiding. And I thought about setting the leaves on fire to drive him out. Finally, I just yelled, "GET FOUND, KID..."*

*Better than Hide and Seek, I like the game called Sardines. In Sardines the person who is IT goes and hides, and everybody goes looking for him. When you find him, you hide there with him. Pretty soon everybody is hiding together, all stacked in a small space like puppies in a pile. And pretty soon somebody giggles and somebody laughs and everybody gets found.*

*Medieval theologians described the hiddenness of God in hide and seek terms calling God Deus Absconditus. But I think old God is a sardine player. And will be found the same way everybody gets found in Sardines – by the sound of laughter of those heaped together in the end.*

*'Olly-olly-oxen-free!' The kids out in the street are hollering the cry that says "Come on in, wherever you are. It's a new game." And so I say: To all those who have hid too well. Get found! Olly-olly-oxen-free.*

Some of us hide too well and some of us don't hide at all. In either case, we cut off the opportunity to be found. What we all share in common within our humanity is the desire to be found, to be known, loved, valued, and understood. That's why when we're children we get angry when we're not found and when we're adults we need to hide our disappointment.

The delightful children's game of "hide and seek" is as old as the human story. *"And Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden... and they hid themselves among the trees. But the Lord God called to them and said, 'Where are you?'"* (Genesis 2:8-9)

Jesus joining us in our humanity is God seeking us out...in this season of Lent we celebrate God coming into our neighborhood, becoming one of the kids, calling out, "Where are you?" Just as Jesus called to Zacchaeus, when he hid in the Sycamore Tree, "Make haste and come down for I must stay at your house today." Nothing is more delightful than being found...than Jesus inviting himself into our home and welcoming us into his—so that we might both laugh and weep together.

In today's parable, we are invited into the home of a man who has two sons, both struggling to come into their own, both seeking to find themselves and longing to be found, and both doing it in their own way.

The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance in order to explore the unknown world in search of himself. According to Jewish tradition, his share as the second-born was only one third. He was already dealt a disadvantage, and rather than stay at home in the shadow of his older brother, he moved on. Perhaps it was his insecurity and naïveté looking for acceptance in all the wrong places that caused him to be overgenerous, used, and abused.

When this younger son came to himself and realized he had hid too well, he found his way home. His father welcomes and embraces the son whom he thought was dead and is alive, the son who was lost and is found, and begins the rituals and celebration!

When the father gets word that his older son, who seemed to hide nothing, is angry and refuses to partake in the celebration, he goes out to entreat him. Luke says he sought him earnestly.

The father listens to his disappointment and jealousy, gently reaffirms his love, and reminds his firstborn that what they have shared over the years—no one can take from them—not even his younger brother. Then the father explains that to love his younger brother and to rejoice in his being found does not negate the love the father has for his firstborn.

And so we find in this parable a profound understanding about the nature of the God who is not hidden: a God who joins us in the neighborhood in Jesus Christ, a God who seeks the lost, a God who welcomes home the found, and a God who loves each and all of us.

*'Olly-olly-oxen-free!' The kids out in the street are hollering the cry that says "Come on in, wherever you are. It's a new game." And so I say: To all those who have hid too well. Get found! Olly-olly-oxen-free.*

By the grace of our Creator, the love of Jesus Christ, and the inquiry of the Holy Spirit, may we be found, may we come to the party, and may we celebrate together the wideness of God's mercy. Amen.