

Sunday, September 11, 2016

I Timothy 1:12-17

Luke 15:1-10

### Seeking the Lost

Have you ever been lost? Really lost so much so you did not know where you were going? We say that with today's technology there is no reason to not know where you are, or how you may find your way back home. But do we or should we rely on this technology as many of us do? And what happens if the GPS does not get the address or name correct in the first place? You end up lost.

People have different ways to find their routes when they go to a new place or even to orient themselves for a few hours or days. They look for landmarks—towers, buildings, signs to help them get from where they are to where they want to go. For example if you can see the Ambassador bridge from wherever you are in Windsor you can easily reorient yourself away from the River and sort of figure out where north, south and east of the river is.

Similarly if you are in Toronto and see the CN Tower you will realize that the city is built north of Lake Ontario and you can figure out which direction you are going by where the tower is in your vision.

Landmarks have served as reference points for discovering new places in relationship with where one is as opposed as to where one wants to be throughout history. How often do people give directions like- go right at the lights, then right again over the bridge until the dead end; turn left and drive a little ways, go past the Timmy's and the building with the big roof that's Glenwood- they are giving landmarks, lights and a brief description of what you'll see.

In the parables that Jesus shared with the many who were listening to him there was a lost sheep and a lost coin. The sheep did not know that it was lost until it was carefully and lovingly cared by the shepherd back to the sheepfold. The coin of course has no ideas at all about anything as an inanimate object but it was lost in the perception of its owner a woman who depended upon each coin for mere survival.

The sheep are out grazing when the shepherd does a head count noticing that one was missing. His livelihood depends upon bringing back the full 100 to safety and so he leaves 99 in the pasture to do what they do best- eat and he searches for the one that has wandered away.

He searches for one while still keeping his eyes on the others concerned of what he might find as he walks. Will he find a wolf having a meal, his animal in distress in a bush or hurting, or just a sheep that is confused and afraid. The shepherd is searching diligently, meticulously and wantonly to find that lost sheep alive and well. And so when the shepherd sees that sheep he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. He is not letting it run freely until they are both at home. He carries the sheep lifting it up around his shoulders away from

the bushes, the dirt, the rocks, trees and hills; away from anything that might bring it harm as he slowly returns to the flock below. He carries the sheep and with the other 99 he goes home.

The Shepherd's day has been in a stressful situation and so instead of just going home to sleep he wants to share his story. Today we would say, that the shepherd in need of venting out his stress decides to gather his friends around to tell them about this stressful day when he almost lost his job as he lost the sheep! But as the shepherd has a gathering of his friends he tells his story with joy.

The woman who has lost one tenth of her money has a dilemma. Should she spend money in order to find money? This woman has ten silver coins and she lost one and it has rolled away somewhere in the darkness of her home. She needs this money in order to live and she has few other resources. Her dilemma is this: Should she go to bed and wait until the morning to search for the coin in the daylight, or stay up, light the lamp and burning the expensive oil to search for her coin in her dark house and clean until it is found. If she had gone to bed, would she have slept? Probably not as she would have been worried about where it had fallen and when she really lost it. But she chose to light the lamp, sweep and move her furnishings around and she accomplished what she set out to do—finding the lost coins. By this time she is a little wired, wide awake and needing to tell others what happened so she goes and tells her friends to come over to hear her story of how she lost the coin and found it and she is filled with joy.

But why did Jesus tell these 'feel good' stories? Tax collectors and sinners—people of different trades, skill levels and backgrounds- all had gathered this man to hear his teachings. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law did not like the attention he was receiving from the crowd and noted that Jesus was welcoming sinners and eats with them as he shared. The Pharisees did not like the people whom they were supposed to serve-yet Jesus shared stories that they could relate to; stories of people like themselves; stories about things that happen in everyday life.

The stories are wonderful in themselves but Jesus goes on and says—that there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent. And that there 'is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents". Jesus was looking for those who were lost and those listening to him understood. The Pharisees did not like Jesus teaching this way of discipleship—following God in love and faith as he had their hearts changed through the Spirit, and so they watched him until such time as he could be arrested. Yet when Jesus spoke the people listened to what he was saying about repentance, righteousness, rejoicing in heaven and living a God filled life.

Here we are hundreds of years later—still talking about repentance, righteousness and the rejoicing that is occurring in heaven when the Spirit of God touches the lives of people. And today, we are rejoicing that this church has been doing this for over 61 years in this location!

According to Paul's letter to Timothy—Jesus came into the world to save sinners- even Paul himself. Jesus also came knowing that he would die in our place for the possibility of our reconciliation with God. God created people who eventually sinned against him and in order for the people and God to be reconciled Jesus came to do this. It is through Jesus' teaching about love, about risking 99 to save one, about turning on the light in a dark room in search of something valuable that we too can be found.

But we also need to realize that we are lost—the sheep and the coin didn't and could not know that they were lost. But those who tended them found them valuable, just as God values each one of us for who we are—His children, a part of his creation, whom God has known since the beginning.

And we also need to look to what is happening for ourselves. We are sinners and we are in need of forgiveness again and again. But are we really wanting the angels to rejoice because of God in Christ is searching for us? Do we wish to be found?

We can continue to use technology to help us find our way. But what happens when the light burns out in the lighthouse and no one is there to see that it is dark? Or what happens when google maps is two years out of date and the road they show still has detours? Or what happens when we lose sight of what is important over what is practical—how will we face the dilemmas/ challenges/ questions in our life? Jesus is looking for you. Are you willing for him to carry you home again? Are you willing to turn on the light and search for the One who is looking for you?

As we celebrate the anniversary of this church let us remember that we are a lighthouse in this community, this neighbourhood as a United Church congregation, it is up to us who have repented, are striving to be righteous in God's eyes and are rejoicing in Christ's grace to keep the light burning so that others whom Christ is seeking will find Him through the relationships that we experience together.

Let us pray- Holy God of unconditional love and praise we give thanks that you rejoice when one of us comes to you in repentance. We rejoice when we gather to celebrate as the body of Christ in this place and when we are challenged as people to know you and to grow in faith. Hear us O God as we come to you singing in prayer and with hope for your blessings today and into the future. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Saviour Amen.