

“Lost and Found”

Sermon on Sunday, September 11, 2022

Dear church,

Many years ago, some may remember, we had an old-fashioned Rally Day Picnic at Fischer’s Park in Towamencin with tons of people, spreads of food, activities, the whole nine yards. Dick Walter brought a trailer filled with remote controlled model airplanes and let them fly. It was a lot of fun, but I remember that day mostly because of one experience. A very memorable experience. Our children were young at the time. They brought friends along and the blue Honda Odyssey which we drove then was filled with excited youngsters. That’s what Honda Odyssey’s are for: transporting small family crowds with all the stuff that families carry around. That van always smelled like family too. It housed old socks, left-behind ice cream containers, crushed-on-the-seat popcorn, and old chips on the floor. We sometimes couldn’t keep up with the clean-up. You know what I mean? It was a family van and it smelled like family!

At the end of that lovely Sunday afternoon, we packed up, filed into the Odyssey, and drove home, tired but happy. It takes about 20 minutes from Fischer’s Park to our house. After ten minutes my cell phone rang. It was Helen Adams. “Pastor, did you forget something?” she asked. I was so tired; I didn’t even get what she was getting at. I looked around and said, “No, we’re fine.” Helen asked again and then a third time. “Pastor, did you forget something?” The cock didn’t crow, but at that point my wife started screaming, “Peter?” “OMG, we don’t have Peter!” Indeed, our youngest son was not in the back seat of the van. He was missing. His responsible parents had left him behind in the park. The reason was, as I learned later: het kid was still glued to Dick Walter’s trailer, mesmerized by the model airplanes. We turned around and got our baby back, and if anyone in the church didn’t know by then, they knew it from then on out: this pastor sometimes forgets things, even his own child!!!

Surprisingly, they still let me serve at Vacation Bible School; they still allowed me to go on trips with children and youth. But we have since brought in Mrs. Bodolus, because she

does not forget children, so if folks are new to our church, they need not worry. The person in charge of children here doesn't forget any children! This is, of course, after all those years, one of my more memorable "Lost and Found" stories, although I have a few; but this is the only one involving a human being. So, having gone through the agony of losing something several times in my life, I know how crappy it feels. And I also know the relief that comes when you retrieve the item or person that was feared lost. "Phew, I got it back!"

The parables for this Sunday are of the Lost and Found variety. In fact, there are a total of three teaching stories in the 16th chapter of Luke; they are without exception about Lost and Found experiences: a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost son. You can see how the stakes are being raised with each narrative. We also know from the setting of these stories, the mumbling of the Pharisees, that the stories served a purpose: to defend and explain the Messiah's practice of reaching out to people on the margins of society, people who either felt lost or were considered lost by mainstream culture, the infamous one percent. When we talk about the "one percent" these days, we often refer to the super rich as if we had nobody else to worry about. When Jesus talked about the one percent in the parable of the Lost Sheep, he talked about the super lost. As we define and redefine our ministries, our mission, our purpose as a church, we try to keep that in mind. Are we willing to go out of our way to find those who are lost on their way? That would be something special, something called discipleship, following Jesus, the way he lived his life and the way he spoke and taught. And when I consider that, I still have much to learn and overcome, mainly fears. But love drives out all fear.

Some people didn't like Jesus' loving attention to the characters he was hanging out with. Yet, the premise of these parables is: these characters are God's beloved children. They may be mentally ill; they may have committed a crime; they may have made some bad choices. They may have never had a good mother or father. And still, they belong. Somebody is missing them, even if it's not their biological families! Somebody out there in the universe is missing them! Someone wants them to come home. To understand each parable, we must connect with the emotional aspect of the experience. Imagine you bought a new bike, shiny and expensive, a mountain bike with suspension, fancy breaks

and gear that cost upwards of \$1,000. You lock it up somewhere and someone steals it anyway. (True story by the way...) And let's say you didn't have a lot of money. This was your saved-up allowance. You can't just buy a new one. Wouldn't you be devastated? About this loss? That's how we feel when we lose what we consider ours. And how happy we would be if we found the lost or stolen item that meant something to us!

Jesus says, that's how God feels about every single person out there. They belong. They are being missed. How can we help finding them? And finally, another question. Did the Pharisees hear God's voice in these parables? It doesn't sound like it. And that's because they were probably lost in a place where God's can't get to them: a place of self-righteousness and arrogance. It's a warning to everyone: let us never get lost there. In every other place you can be found, but if you are too sure of yourself and too sure of what other people do wrong, it's very difficult for God to find you. So please, let us grow with Jesus' teachings of who belongs into this world: everybody! **Amen.**