

Sermon for Sunday, September 11, 2022

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Choosing Love”

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[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved people of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

I lose things a lot.

I've spent hours of my life looking for my phone, my glasses, my keys. The other day I searched for my phone for 15 minutes only to find it in my pocket. In my defense, not enough women's clothes have pockets; so, I'm not always used to looking there!

What do you do when you've lost something important? How do you feel?

If it seems I've really, truly lost something, and not just misplaced it temporarily, I feel panic in the pit of my stomach and a growing sense of helplessness. I burn with frustration at myself and the situation and usually try to find someone else to blame.

What about when people seem lost? What do you do? How do you feel:
When you see them doing things that are harming themselves and others?
When you miss their presence and don't understand where they've gone?
When their words and actions hurt the larger community?
Helplessness, fear, dread, anger?

I wonder if this sense of people being lost is what's making life in the US so hard right now. We see so many who seem to have lost their way, especially *those* people who think *like that*, who do *that*. When we're honest, we often feel we've lost our way, too. But we don't know what to do about it. We grumble like the Pharisees and scribes in the Gospel reading today. We blame others and ourselves. We try apathy, avoidance, separation, rage. None of that seems to be helping, but we don't know what else to do.

How does God feel when people get lost? What does God do?

Our Exodus reading shows us that God *feels* sorrow and anger when we get lost. God's love for us means God is vulnerable to being hurt by us. So, when God's people get lost, make a golden calf, and trust their own devices rather than God, God feels it like a punch in the gut. For a time, God seems to want distance, separation, and the protection of rage and blame rather than the vulnerability of love. Yet Moses pleads with God to not give up on the people, to channel that longing for things to be different into mercy and forgiveness. And Moses' plea matters: It influences God, it changes things - changes God's mind even. God recommits to relationship, love, and vulnerability.

And this is what God does again and again throughout scripture and on the cross. God chooses to be like a woman searching for a lost coin or phone getting down on her hands and knees, dumping out her purse, digging in the couch cushions. God acts like a shepherd risking everything to

seek one lost sheep by throwing caution to the wind, wading through bushes and brambles, carrying the sheep home on his shoulders. When God longs for a lost son to return home, God channels that ache into beautiful mercy and forgiveness that changes everything. God even throws parties, calling together friends and neighbors to rejoice in what has been found. This is really risky. Some might be mad that there's a party for that lost sheep, that lost son. Some may choose not to come. Yet God has invested everything into seeking us and rejoicing in us.

God's vulnerable love makes it possible for us to love. Relationship with others - in families, communities, congregations, and a democracy - leaves us open to pain, to feeling punched in the gut as God did. It's so tempting to try to protect ourselves from this heartache. And sometimes we do need protection and distance. There are times when it isn't safe or good to keep seeking relationship. We don't have to risk it all to try to save or be in relationship with someone who is harming us or the community. That's God's job. It is God's work to find and save the lost.

And God is always doing this for us who need saving just as much as those people. When we are trapped in the brambles of anger and frustration, God is there ready to carry us home in loving arms. When we are stuck in the couch cushions of dread and helplessness, God is there on her hands and knees to find us again. God is always working to draw us into the feast, into the party where all are called friends and neighbors. At God's feast, we find that the community is richer because of each person that is found, each one that is drawn in. We need each other, we are all lost in some ways when one is lost.

At God's feast we are given what we need to stay in relationship, to remain open to others, to be in community. At the feast, we are changed by the witness and pleas and prayers of others. At the feast, our longing for change is formed into mercy and kindness. We're renewed in our calling to have parties where all are viewed as friends and neighbors. As a congregation, we do that every Sunday in worship and tonight at the picnic.

Beloved, God rejoices in you.

God gives us what we need to choose the way of love and mercy and rejoicing.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.