

Luke 15:1

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 he told them this parable: 4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Luke 15:1-10, 2016

This gospel passage over the years has taken on significant meaning I would suggest, not just for me, but for all of us,

and that meaning is hard to ignore given that this weekend is the 15th anniversary of the historical event out of which that meaning rises like the dust and smoke at ground zero in New York City, on September 11, 2001.

That day began like any other day for most of us, but by days end all our lives would be changed forever.

On that day there were many heroes who gave everything to save as many people as they could before the buildings collapsed,

and who continued the work to search and rescue any who may have survived after the collapse.

On the occasion of this anniversary there is a story at least some of us had not heard before this week, or may not remember.

It is the story of “the man with the red bandanna,” Welles Crowther

It is the story of a man, who as a boy was given a red bandanna handkerchief by his father to blow,

while he preserved the white one he carried for show.

Welles, who always wanted to be a fireman, but became a Wall Street trader,

ended up using an identical red bandanna to cover his nose and mouth while he searched for and helped save people in the south Tower after it was hit by the airplane.

Welles was in the end buried in the rubble, found months later with a group of firemen.

You, I am sure, remember the days of people searching for their loved ones, putting up signs and posters with pictures on them.

There were community bulletin boards put up for this purpose.

People were wandering the streets, looking, searching the hospitals for their loved ones.

These parables are in large part about the one who searches, describing the nature of God, the nature of Jesus who seeks out the lost to restore them.

These stories are about the shepherd who risks everything to go out and find the one that is lost leaving the other 99 unattended,

and the woman who, losing one of her 10 coins, works diligently to find it.

After finding what was lost they both get their friends together to rejoice in celebration.

Maybe we can write our own parable,

What person, having lost a loved one in a disaster does not make fliers with description and picture of the lost one and search the streets and hospitals carefully until they find them? When they have found them they call together their friends and neighbors saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the one I love that I had lost." And there is joy in

heaven, in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

This is how God looks for you. And when He finds you there is joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God.

So, what is it like to be the one who is lost and being sought after?

This is not what these stories are primarily about but think about that for a minute.

How do you experience being so loved and cared for that the ones who love you will sacrifice everything to find you.

And then when you are found, Oh, the celebration!

While this is not the point of the parables it does share another point the parables make;

God often works through ordinary people to do the extraordinary work of helping to find someone.

I mentioned earlier that Jesus tells these stories to unveil the nature of God,

the one who searches, who seeks out the lost to restore them,

to renew his relationship with them, to create joy and rejoicing!

Jesus has welcomed the outsider, the lost into the community, his community, including the Pharisees and scribes who are there.

He has invited tax collectors and sinners to be with him, to eat with him.

He has received the Pharisees and scribes who grumble about the others because they believe that everyone has their place and should stay there,

and that a religious leader like Jesus shouldn't have anything to do with certain people,

especially those beneath them.

Jesus unveils God's attitude about those people, and wants us to understand.

He wants us to know the search takes work, it requires heart, love, commitment.

Some of what is lost may not appear to have much value in the grand scheme of things, but it is worth finding.

It doesn't matter if it is the poor, the homeless, the infirm, the sick, the alcoholic, drug addict, the young or the old.

All who God wants in his presence are worth finding.

The search is the priority,

and when the lost is found there is rejoicing in heaven.

This passage describes God as the one who searches, but also describes us and our work in the community of faith.

It describes our evangelism.

You are going to hear more and more about evangelism in the coming months.

How are we reaching out into the community with the good news that Jesus has given everything, even his own life for the one who is lost,

for each and every one God searches out with his love
grace and mercy?

Some people make it easy for us. We enjoy the company of many visitors here at All Saints throughout the course of the year.

We will have many here this weekend.

This is the easy part of our evangelism work to proclaim God's love,

and make his presence known to everyone who gathers here.

Every week you hear me offer a word of welcome to our guests and visitors.

But this is only the beginning. Much of the rest of the work you need to do by offering your welcome, introducing yourself,

by offering the peace of Christ you share with them,

by offering the possibility of a new relationship, a new friend,

authentic acceptance, hope and care.

You have heard me say since I first came here that anyone who comes onto this campus for any reason,

at any time should leave here knowing they have been in the presence of God.

That is why we have greeters, refreshments before Sunday worship, ushers to assist, to help our guests and visitors experience God's presence in an authentically warm, welcoming environment.

That is why I encourage you to move around the nave, sit in different places, offer your seat to someone else.

We don't have reserved seating here.

God seeks the lost, searches out those in need of his presence, and sometimes calls them here because he knows how hard we work at this very thing.

We are a part of his searching. That is what we are called to be about.

Like the Welles Crowthers of this world who seek the lost in some of the most horrific circumstances, giving their very life,

Jesus has given his life for you,

and calls you, beckons you, to give yourself to the search for others.

In that you, we all, can rejoice in celebration!

Lets share that with our community and the rest of the world.