

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Lost”

Rally Sunday-September 12, 2010

Reverend Art Ritter

Luke 15:1-10

15 Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 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 people 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.’

The other day I saw a rather humorous story during the sports report time of the local news. The story showed several members of the Miami Dolphins football team crawling around the practice field on their hands and knees- looking for something that was lost. It was rather funny watching these huge football players slowly and delicately moving around as if engaged in a giant game of Twister. At first I thought they were looking for someone’s contact lens, an unusual thing but not so improbable among athletes. But then the camera showed a couple of the players with large leaf rakes, gently moving the blades of grass on the practice field to find that thing for which they were looking. What was it that was lost? It turns out that one of the players had lost a diamond earring. He had forgotten to remove it from his ear before he put his helmet on and somehow during the practice session the earring dislodged and disappeared. Apparently the earring was worth around \$50,000 thousand dollars, and that is why he and his teammates were searching so long and carefully for it. The story closed with the sportscaster telling us that after an hour or so of diligent searching, the earring was still not found. The beginning of the school year reminds me of the time when Maren was in kindergarten and rode the school bus each and every day. One day as I was waiting for her at the bus stop I received a shock. The bus pulled up, lots of students got off, but Maren was not one of them. I went into an instant panic. Where was she? Was she OK? I immediately went back to the house and called the school. They checked with the teacher and assured me to the best of their knowledge that Maren had gotten on the bus. I was then given the number for district transportation. After several long and agonizing minutes on hold, I was finally able to speak to someone who told me that they would try to contact the driver by radio. And so I waited again, thinking about all of the horrible possibilities concerning my lost child. Finally the voice returned to the phone. She informed me that indeed Maren was still on the bus, and that she simply did not get off at her stop, and that the bus driver finally noticed her when everyone else had exited.

But she was not lost and suddenly I felt as if the weight of the world had been lifted from my shoulders.

The 15th chapter of the gospel of Luke tells three stories of things that are lost. There is a lost coin. There is a lost sheep. There is a lost son. It is important to consider to whom these stories were being told. Jesus' audience is the Pharisees and the scribes. And they have come to him complaining that he is speaking with tax collectors and eating meals with sinners, wasting his time with people who aren't with the program.

Jesus is speaking to the lost and we may think we know who they are. They are the people without faith. They are those who need to return to God. They are people who never come to church. They are those who will miss ChickenFest today. But surprise, these are not the lost to which Jesus is speaking. According to Jesus, the lost are those who think that they following the right path and doing the right thing. They are the Pharisees and the scribes themselves. They are us, you and me, the people who attend worship faithfully, who follow the rules carefully, who knock ourselves out to honor our commitments and yet still somehow distance ourselves from God, who lose contact and don't realize it.

If we can be honest about, Jesus is right. We are lost. We tried to keep up the pretense of the certainty of our bearings but our burdens of life are wearing us down. We had thought that through maintaining a busy schedule and keeping our noses clean that we could somehow manage to stay on top of the wave. Now we feel as if we are drowning. We have thought all along we could always find God with good deeds, a sincere prayer, or the right spot in the pew. But in our heart we may feel abandoned in our troubles, trapped in our circumstance, and overwhelmed by our obligation. Frankly there are times when we feel just plain lost.

But there is good news here for all of us lost. God hasn't set the standards by which we are trying to find out way. And it isn't over between God and us until God says it is over! God loves us as we are and God seeks us out where we are. God's passion toward finding the lost is greater than a hundred football players searching for a diamond in the grass. It is greater than a parent worried sick about a missing child on a school bus. God's quest for the lost goes to a far land and to a distant country. No matter what or who is lost, God's mercy is reckless. No matter what or who is lost, God wants to seek them out and bring back home.

Rather than abandoning us when we are lost, God wants to lift us up and carry us back to where we belong. Rather than keeping us in the dark when we are lost- lonely and forgotten, God seeks to bring us to the light that we can be renewed and recovered. Rather than casting us out because of our stubbornness or our self-righteousness, God welcomes us home and throws a party when we return. We don't have to do anything but admit that we are lost and open our arms to the grace of our loving God.