

Andy Rooney, the personality on *60 Minutes* has spoken pointedly about street directions. He said once, "It would not do this country any harm at all if there were college courses on the subject of giving directions. Someone will say, 'Go down here and turn left at the third traffic light. Keep going until you run into a dead end at Sixteenth Street, then bear right.' Those are simply enough, so you set out to follow directions. Within ten minutes you're at the corner of Broad and 4th streets, hopelessly lost. You never saw a Sixteenth Street. You feel either stupid and frustrated for not being able to follow simple directions or you feel outraged at the person who gave them to you."

Andy Rooney says he often "wanted to go back, find the guy and grab him by the throat. 'All right, fella. You told me to turn left at the third traffic light and then keep going until I hit a dead end at Sixteenth. You were trying to get me lost, weren't you? Confess!' It wouldn't be any use though. I know what he'd say. He'd say, 'That's not counting this light right here. If you count this light, it's four.' Or he'd say, 'Maybe it's Eighteenth Street where the dead end is...' or 'You see, Sixteenth Street turns into Terwilliger Avenue after you cross Summit Boulevard.' Whatever his answer is, it's hopeless. He didn't mean to mislead you and you didn't mean to get lost, but that's what usually happens." (333, Rooney)

We know what it is to get lost. Sometimes we can laugh about getting lost. Either we know someone who gets arrogant and irrational and ignores maps or we know the confusion and perspiration. Sometimes getting lost is nothing to laugh about. We get lost for many reasons.

This morning, we consider two of Jesus' parables aimed at those who know they are lost as well as those who are also lost but believe they are found. We do this for a reason. We are here at a critical time in the history of this church. Since 1952, there has been a congregation on this site building the church of Jesus Christ. In recent months, we have taken on the task of renovating these facilities. In the meantime, we have also read scripture together and answered questions about our life together here. With our Vision and Discernment groups, we have been talking about our purpose, our identity and even our values as a people. We would believe we are doing something important here. Some might even consider we are building the kingdom of God.

Jesus' parables are an excellent resource for anyone trying to build the church. One scholar has said about this text, "*The theological issues here circle around...who is in and who is out, who is lost and who is found, what does it mean to be saved by Christ, and what does it mean to be the community of Christ today.*" (68, Bader-Saye) Not a bad thing for believers like us to chew on and consider as we build. What determines what kind of community we are? Do we simply create a church on the basis of what we want, what we like? Or do we pay attention to Jesus' own words to help us create a community of joy and peace?

I have heard people say things about what they think the church needs. "We've got to get more people in here." "We need to recruit more people. We need more 'giving units.'" "We need younger families. After all, they are our future!" And I would agree and applaud those who believe this.

The way the church catches these folks is critical to who we are. The church has always been shaped best by the gospel. We have always been formed most faithfully by a story that conveys God's care and God's discovery. We have always taken shape most faithfully when we really accept God's compassion for us and take responsibility for what we do next. Let's consider these two parables to help us with this. From Luke 15, verse 1 to 10, hear the word of the Lord.

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming 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 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."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Can you feel the energy these characters are using to go and search? The shepherd leaves the flock of ninety nine. He knows it is important his sheep are protected and healthy. He tends them so that he can take them to the shearer and offer wool on the local market. If there are enough lambs, he can sell some of the older sheep to be slaughtered. It is a poor economy. If you have a flock of a hundred sheep, you look after every one of them. If one gets lost, it is a serious risk to leave the rest to search for the one. Imagine what a shepherd would say. "Where could that animal be? Came by the stream; cut through the valley and down by that ridge; came into this God-forsaken wilderness; I thought every one of them was there. You two stay here and watch while I go back and find that animal. Don't know when I'll be back."

Or the housekeeper? She has lost a coin she's been saving. She is desperate...already swept the house today. She retraces her steps, going over everything she did through the morning. Now she lights a lamp in the middle of the afternoon. With a lamp in hand, she awkwardly sweeps the house again and searches carefully. "I did this room and this room. Now I will do it again." She loses a silver drachma. One drachma was a laborer's daily wage. (1989, Tiede) Five drachmas would buy an ox. (71, Cousar) Not a fortune, but it is what people live on. Can you see what she is doing? She is looking for that lost coin.

The energy is God's energy. God is going after tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees and scribes. The energy and power of the shepherd going out to search or the housekeeper lighting a lamp and sweeping again is meant not to be missed by anyone. Do you see the tax collectors and sinners? They are coming closer to listen. Do you see the Pharisees and scribes? They are rolling their eyes, trying to catch Jesus in a mistake. They are all lost. God searches for the lost. The church is the church because God finds those who have lost their way and even those who don't think they have. You may be lost because of bad behavior. You may be lost because of an attitude like the Pharisees. The good news is God cares about you. If you are lost, God is searching for you.

Not only does God search for everybody, God finds those who are lost. When the lost sheep is found and when the lost coin is found, there is always a celebration. First of all, notice God is searching for the lost.

Here is the second thing to be noticed in these parables. The sheep is found. The coin is discovered and what a celebration over each discovery. Can you see this celebration when the sheep is found? The shepherd doesn't beat him with a stick and run him back to the flock. He lays the sheep on his shoulders. He carries the sheep himself the distance back from the ravine to the place where the other ninety nine sheep are. Somehow when he gets home, he calls friends and neighbors and invites them to come and get excited with him for what he has found. The housekeeper is just the same. When she finally locates the silver drachma behind the cupboard, she screams at the top of her voice. Goes out the front door, drachma in hand, calls her neighbor friends and even the random people going by in the street. She tells these people to come in and help her celebrate what she has found.

Two years ago, our daughter, Caroline rescued a dog. The agency said this puppy had been put out and left on a country road. Someone picked her up and put her in a foster home. Caroline applied for a dog and this woman called her. I remember the day we went to meet Lily. She was barely two months-old hiding under a dresser. The woman pulled her out, gave her to Caroline; Lily's tail was between her legs. She was shaking all over, frightened and afraid. She was lost. Caroline took her home and has loved her now for two years. Today Lily is a different dog. Wags her tail, wags her

whole body. She even barks at people she believes are intruders. The first year of her life she never barked. She tends to be a little nervous. But Caroline rescued this fuzzy friend and to see Lily you can tell. It is amazing how we can love animals and see them change from being lost to being found, from being afraid to being loved; from being alone to being part of the family.

There is joy in heaven, the parable says. There is joy in heaven among the angels of God when one sinner repents. When one tax collector decides to get honest, when one sinner decides to stop her bad behavior, when one Pharisee begins to hear what Jesus is saying, When one of us changes our minds or our ways, there is joy in heaven. Hear the good news of the day. First of all, God searches for us. Secondly, when God finds us, when sinners change their minds and their ways, heaven rejoices.

If you ever wonder about the value of changing your mind, remember Martin Niemoller. He was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's friend and fellow Lutheran pastor. Neimoller believed for several years that the Reich church, the church that supported Adolph Hitler, would be the salvation of Germany and the world. Bonhoeffer never believed that, of course and tried to convince his friend. Niemoller tended to separate issues of church and state. There came a day when Niemoller changed his mind. His change of mind cost him his freedom. He was arrested and sent to a concentration camp as a personal prisoner of Hitler. Many years after the war, Niemoller wrote his infamous words born of his mind change and the ensuing experience:

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out— because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--- because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out---because I was not a Jew. And they came for me--- and there was no one left to speak for me. (191-192, Metaxas)

We are building here a church full of people who need Jesus Christ. We are building a church of those who have been lost. God has searched for us. God has found us. God keeps finding us. If you ever wonder about the sound of this celebration, just listen after we announce the assurance of pardon. If you are quiet enough, you can hear the angels singing in full volume. If you can't hear that, look into the faces of neighbors with whom you share the peace of Christ. There are people around you who regularly rejoice that they are forgiven and accepted and loved. Their quiet celebration on a given Sunday in the simplest of ways is finding God finding us.

Loving God, we pray for all of us who are lost. We pray especially for those of us who do not think we are lost. Find us, Lord. Find us and bring us home to yourself in Jesus' name and for the sake of a world that is lost and in need of your finding them too. So we pray...Our Father who art in heaven...

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