

“How to Get Found”  
Luke 15:1-10  
Sunday, September 11, 2016  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

Ralph Milton tells of the teacher who, for reasons of her own, asked the kids one day, “If all the bad children were painted red and all the good children were painted green, which color would you be?”

Think about it. What color would you be? Red or Green? It’s a tough question, isn’t it, when you’re only given two options.

One very wise child answered the teacher: “Striped.”

**I. Nearness (v. 1)**

The Pharisees and the scribes don’t see it that way. They want to have clear categories for the Red and the Green people, the “bad” children and the “good” children.

It’s the religious insiders – like us, the “church people” – who are called to repentance in these two parables of Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes are offended that Jesus is constantly including “tax collectors and sinners” (v. 1) at table. The Pharisees and the scribes are offended that Jesus teaches with parables that encourage the sinners. These same parables tend to put the Pharisees and the scribes in a negative light.

I don’t know about you, but I prefer to identify myself with the sinners. To admit that I’m a religious insider – a Pharisee – is painful and unpleasant.

Of course, religious insiders are sinners, too. And we often feel lost, as well. We often feel like outsiders, at least in some aspects of our lives.

Verse one of our gospel reading states that: “all the tax collectors and sinners were

coming near to listen to him.” “Nearness” can be a threat, particularly to insiders, when outsiders start coming too near to the centers of power. This is what Jesus is addressing with the Pharisees and the scribes, who feel threatened by the nearness of the tax collectors and the sinners.

“How do we react when our nearness is threatened?” (G. Penny Nixon).

We can think of a long list of folks who make us feel threatened when they draw near. The situation is complicated by the fact that some folks are threatening. On this Sunday when we remember the events of September 11, 2001, and honor the dead and the injured and their families, we know on a deep level the complicated nature of the situation. We do, in fact, feel threatened when certain folks draw near to us. And sometimes folks who draw near to us are, in point of fact, threatening.

As we study the stories of Jesus, we become aware that he is not teaching his followers how to be safe. He is teaching his disciples how to be faithful to the kingdom of God. And he is teaching the Pharisees and the scribes that their ways are often antithetical to God’s kingdom. And he is teaching the tax collectors and sinners that they belong, even though they have been excluded for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

## **II. Diligence (vv. 4 & 8).**

“Which one of you,” Jesus asks, “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?...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?” (vv. 4 & 8). The search requires diligence. God searches diligently, tirelessly, for the lost.

I like a term G. Penny Nixon uses for religious insiders. She calls them “the already

found.”

If the already found were to diligently seek the lost, as God does, this would be true repentance. True repentance is about change. It’s about turning around, having a change of heart, changing one’s mind. It’s not about feeling bad; it’s about a decision to act in new ways.

To diligently and tirelessly search for the lost, to welcome them in – this would be true repentance. This would be vastly different from waiting for the lost lamb to miraculously wander back in from the wilderness, joining the flock of its own accord. This would be a far cry from waiting for a lost coin to suddenly pick itself up and roll itself back into the pile of the “already found” coins.

Made in the image of God, we have the choice to imitate his ways. In these two stories, Jesus invites us to welcome sinners who draw near, and to search tirelessly for those who have strayed afar. This is what our God does. This is what our God deeply desires of us.

When we draw near and listen to these two stories of Jesus, we see that, in God’s eyes, there is no distinction between the one sheep and the ninety-nine; between the one coin and the nine. All are sinners in need of repentance; all are loved and sought after by God. Truth be told, sometimes the ninety-nine are more lost than the one little lamb in the wilderness who knows, desperately, his need for God.

### **III. Welcome (vv. 6 & 9).**

We’ve talked about “nearness,” and we’ve talked about “diligence.”

These parables of Jesus are also about God’s welcoming nature. God searches tirelessly for the one lost lamb. God lights a lamp, gets out the broom, and searches every hidden corner of the house for the one lost coin. And when they are found, does he lecture the lost one for its waywardness? Does he punish the sheep or the coin for having wandered astray?

Verse 6 says, “he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’” Verse 9 says, “she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’”

Beloved author and humorist, Erma Bombeck, tells this story about being in church one Sunday. She writes:

“I was intent on a small child who was turning around smiling at everyone. He wasn't gurgling, spitting, humming, kicking, tearing the hymnals, or rummaging through his mother's handbag. He was just smiling. Finally, his mother jerked him about and in a stage whisper that could be heard in a little theater off Broadway said, ‘Stop grinning! You're in a church!’ With that, she gave him a belt on his hind side and as the tears rolled down his cheeks added, ‘that's better,’ and returned to her prayers. I wanted to grab this child with the tear-stained face close to me and tell him about my God. The happy God. The smiling God, the God who had to have a sense of humor to have created the likes of us.”

### **Closing**

God celebrates and rejoices when the lost are found. God welcomes the sinners. The angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner – either a tax collector or a Pharisee – repents and believes.

Some here today may feel like the lost lamb – alone and frightened in a wilderness where food and water are scarce and fierce predators are a constant threat. Some here today may feel like the lost coin – hidden in a pile of dust in a far, unreachable corner under the sofa.

Even those of us in the category of religious insiders – the “already found” – may be feeling lost today.

All of us are sought after by a God who loves us with a deep, abiding love. God sees you

out there in the wilderness, lost and alone. God sees you, keeping company with the dust bunnies under the couch. God sees you, hiding from his love. Hiding from the community of the church, even if you're supposedly an "insider." Fearful that you are too sinful, too unlovable, even if you're supposedly "already found."

For God, there are no insiders and outsiders; no Red or Green. For God, the lost and the found are one people – a rainbow of people whom he loves. For God, there is no boundary between the church and the world. God loves everyone – he invites us, he diligently searches after us, he welcomes us.

Rest in the assurance of God's love for you, today.

As we come to the Table this morning, let's resolve to share God's love with at least one person this week. And let's resolve, on this 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11, to entrust our fears to God. Jesus never promised that we would be safe. He only calls us to be faithful to his kingdom.

Come to the Table. Find love and security in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.