

July 14, 2019
Preached by Rev. Keith Tanis
West Side Presbyterian Church

The Gospel is spelled... FOUND!

Luke 15:1-10

The Gospel is spelled... an open invitation to share **what's seems important to me right now. And for me right now, what seems important is that God wants you to GET FOUND!** I believe that the Gospel is about God's love for people, for me, for you and for everyone—especially for people who are “lost.” In text this morning Jesus tells two stories about seeking and finding something that's been lost, a lost sheep and a lost coin. LUKE 15¹⁻¹⁰

Seeking and finding remind me of a story about “hide & seek” that Robert Fulghum tells in his book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.

As I write this, the(re's a) neighborhood game (of hide & seek) ... and there is a kid under a pile of leaves in the yard just under my window. He has been there a long time now, and everybody else is found and they are about to give up on him over at the base. I considered going out to the base and telling them where he is hiding. And I thought about setting the leaves on fire to drive him out. Finally, I just yelled, "GET FOUND, KID!" out the window. And scared him so bad he probably wet his pants and started crying and ran home to tell his mother. It's real hard to know how to be helpful sometimes.

My message to you this morning is just that: GET FOUND KID!

Whether accidentally lost or intentionally hiding, the sheep, the coin, or the PEOPLE they represent are LOST, separated from the whole group of sheep/coins/people of God. These stories are the basis of common Christian language of people being LOST. We'll sing it in a familiar hymn a bit later:

Amazing Grace...I once was LOST, but now am FOUND!

In the 70s the language changed. Instead of “lost” people we talked about “seekers.” Lost people were really “seekers” looking for God as if *God* was the one who was lost. Churches needed to be “seeker-sensitive” so that people would be attracted by our programs, our music and our messages and stick around long enough to FIND the God they were looking for.

That language is biblical too. The prophet Isaiah says (*verse 55:6*) *Seek the Lord while he may be found...*

But on balance, the Bible has a lot more to say about us wandering off or hiding and God seeking US than the other way around!

In *Luke 15*, God isn't lost or hiding. Instead, Jesus is the good shepherd looking for lost sheep. **God is** the woman with a lamp & a broom sweeping under the dresser **looking for us**.

There is a popular idea in many religions today, even among Christians, even among Presbyterians that people aren't really lost. This popular idea says that everybody is OK, all roads lead to God, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. No one is lost. No one needs to be found. People might need help because they're sick or poor or unemployed or uneducated or in a dysfunctional family. But no one is *lost*.

The idea that "no one is lost" clashes with a lot of what Jesus *actually said* and taught. As I understand the Bible, humanity got lost. Humanity—all of us—got **separated from God, from a loving, nurturing community & from the meaningful abundant life God intended**. We got lost like the sheep in the story: alone, at risk, without a sense of direction.

According to the Bible, being lost is a moral condition the Bible calls SIN. Without God's help we're headed in the *wrong* direction. The further we head in that direction—away from God—the more out of whack our lives become. The only way to get your life headed in the *right* direction, to get back where we belong, is a change of direction the Bible calls *repentance*. Repentance means admitting we were wrong, accepting God's unconditional love, and following where God leads us.

Without help, we're LOST! The Gospel—The historic Christian faith—teaches that **God is a seeking God and wants YOU and me to GET FOUND!** Jesus came to find lost people like us, AND—in the words of Jesus' story, to carry us on his shoulders back where we belong!

I'm a Christian because God found me first. God took the initiative. I heard the story of Jesus over and over through my childhood. I sang "Jesus Loves ME" and believed it. **The Holy Spirit moved in me & overwhelmed me with the grace of God SO THAT I said YES to Jesus:** I believed Jesus loved me. I loved Jesus *back* and I decided to follow Jesus!

© Jesus is looking for YOU! God wants you to GET FOUND! Nothing makes God happier! *There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (7, 10)!* GET FOUND. Jesus is reaching out to you. He loves you! GET FOUND! Let Jesus hold you. Let Jesus carry you!

Maybe you don't feel lost this morning, but, **maybe you've wandered off**. Somehow you've slipped out of God's purse and rolled into some dust bunnies under God's bed! WE ARE ALL PRONE TO WANDER as we just sang: (Come, thou fount...) *"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love..."*

Sheep get lost—get separated from the flock—not because they're headstrong & defiant but because they're careless. Easily distracted by a tuft of greener grass a little further away. And gradually they slip away from the flock.

It happens to ALL of us. *Isaiah 53:6 ALL we like sheep have gone astray...We wander off from a loving connection with Jesus in the same way.* We get **distracted** by our busy lives. **Discouraged** by all the bad news in our world.. Or we may begin to **doubt** that God is really there and really cares.

We don't start out this way. We don't intend for it to happen. It kind of sneaks up on you. Our closeness to God slips away gradually. Bit by bit. Step by step, we wander away from where we belong. WE GET LOST.

When I was 3-4 years old, I got lost! BRUCE...picked me up & brought me back to my mom and dad.

Bruce was like the good shepherd Jesus who (vs. 4-5) *...go(es) after the one that is lost until he finds it. When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders & rejoices!*

The Holy Spirit comes looking for you & will use any means to find you.

Song *Victory in Jesus*

Sunset "God rays" reminds you of God's power & presence
Lincoln Park, Ho rain forest, Rainier

Setback [2 family & 1 friend struggling w/health]

Situation [woman at the wedding last night]

If you're wandering, If you've gotten/getting lost, ☺ Jesus is looking for you! GET FOUND!

Let God carry you back where you belong—close to God. United with the family of God, the community of faith, the flock where "the Lord is our shepherd..."

GET FOUND & experience again, that you are "beloved and chosen" as Pastor Laurie described it last week!

Robert Fulghum ends his story of Hide & Seek with this observation:

Better than hide-and-peek, I like the game called Sardines. In Sardines the person who is IT goes and hides, and everybody goes looking for him. When you find him, you get in with him and hide there with him. Pretty soon everybody is hiding together, all stacked in a small space like puppies in a pile. And pretty soon somebody giggles and somebody laughs and everybody gets found. Medieval theologians even described God in hide-and-peek terms, calling him Deus Absconditus (The Hidden God). But me, I think... God is a Sardine player. And will be found the same way everybody gets found in Sardines - by the sound of laughter of those heaped together at the end.

That's the happy and amazing part of the story, after all. That we, **the church**, God's **sheep**, God's **purse**, are God's **strategy** for seeking and finding the lost. We are the ones who let others know that God is a seeking God and wants us all to GET FOUND!

So if the church—the Holy catholic church, the PCUSA, West Side Pres—maybe if we giggled and laughed more, maybe if we let people know that we're here & having a good time maybe then more people would pile in with us and GET FOUND!

Let's keep looking for lost people out there! And let's also look out for people in here who are wandering. Let's say to all of them in the love of Jesus, GET FOUND!

Are you up for a little "hide-and-seek?!" Or maybe a game of sardines?!