

Sermons at Christ Church

A rise, for the task is yours, take courage and do it.

Pentecost XIV

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I am a feather on the breath of God. I lean on God throughout the day. I savor the solid Earth beneath me and the air that fills me. Amen.

When we lose our way, we become rudderless. A rudder is defined by Wikipedia as a primary control surface used to steer a ship, boat, submarine, hovercraft, aircraft, or other conveyance that moves through a fluid medium. When we lose our way, we become a people with no particular sense of direction. We live our lives become as if it isn't anchored in any set of values nor does it look up to anything of substance. The wind blows us to whichever direction it so desires because we are not held to anything. We become less accountable for our actions because we have convinced ourselves to believe that there's no God to whom we should be answerable. We wander as in being lost. But as J.R.R. Tolkien once wrote "Not all who wander are lost." We may wander and lose our way, but we can yet still be found and brought home. The shepherd is not giving up on us nor is the poor woman. Their effort in finding the lost expresses the extent to which God goes in finding and reconciling with sinners who have lost their way. That effort tells us more about God than the sordid human condition which the prophet rails about.

The prophet Jeremiah decries the extent to which the people of Israel have become rudderless. They have totally betrayed their calling as being a light to the nations. What the people have basically done is to reject the God who had been their shepherd all along, and have become moored to nothing. In the process, they have not only become foolish and stupid, but are now very skillful in doing evil. For all that they have done, their land would be brought to its knees. The prophet's prediction about what will happen is dire.

The psalmist provides some sort of a rationale for the complaints of the prophet when he argues that the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God, says so because that fool lacks the moral and spiritual compass which is meant to guide him or her in doing what is right, and what God requires

of him or her. These people are foolish that is why they have rejected God. For, to admit the idea of God is to be accountable, but the fool rejects accountability.

When someone is lost, they become rudderless, they operate within the framework that necessitates the violence and desolation that the prophet predicts. For the psalmist, God looks down with compassion over the lost, but unlike the Pharisees and Scribes, God does not give up on them. God restores the fortunes of the lost-the sinner who has lost the way. The point is, the sinner cannot do it by himself or herself, the sinner cannot restore the self unto God's good graces and fellowship, it is God who does the restoration, it is God who takes the initiative-that is why it is the shepherd who goes looking for the sheep; that is why it is the poor woman who sweeps in search for the coin. It is for this reason that Paul reminds us in his letter to Timothy "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the foremost." God Himself had to take that onerous but sacred initiative to reconcile the lost sinner to Himself.

I am convinced that there's more in you than you know. There's more value to you than you may care to acknowledge. Have you ever thought of yourself as that one lost sheep? Have you ever considered yourself to be that lost coin? Maybe, the question we need to ask is, why would the shepherd leave the other sheep, exposing them to all kinds of danger, while he searches for the one lost sheep? Why would the woman light a lamp and meticulously sweep her entire room in search of that one coin. If the shepherd could leave the rest of the flock in search of that one sheep, if the woman would seek that missing coin, then it stands to reason that that ONE sheep or coin is equal or more value than the rest.

I remember when I was a little boy walking to school and finding fliers posted on trees, electricity and telephone poles and buildings. The message on those fliers was simple "I've found it." I didn't know what it meant nor did I ever ask anyone what it meant. The message spoke for itself. And today I speak about being found. Yes, we often lose our way but the joy in life isn't about being lost, it is about knowing that someone cares about you, cares more than enough about you to look for you, and not only that, the person actually rejoices over finding you. I am more than satisfied with the joy of knowing that you are precious enough to be sought after. That you are so, so precious in the sight of God that God deems you worthy of His best efforts. You are so valuable to God that He has never taken His eyes off of you-remember the song, His Eye is on the Sparrow. "... When Jesus is my portion.

When Jesus is my friend. OOO I sing because I'm free. I sing because I am happy. His eye is on the Sparrow. And I know He watches me." And his word assures me that I am of more value than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. I know that I am worth more than the Sparrow.

There's more in you than you know. There's more in you than you care to appreciate. There's more about you that God finds appealing and worthy of His time and effort. And that it is because of you that Paul reminds Timothy, Christ came to save us-people like you and me who have lost our way.

In the gospel story, the Pharisees and Scribes condemn Jesus for having table fellowship with sinners. They had not only given up on the sinners, but have concluded that these who have lost their way, do not deserve fellowship with Jesus. And if Jesus so shares a table with them, then he too, is a sinner like them. He's lost his way like the people with whom he is hanging out-guilt by association.

Jesus not only rejects that narrative but he tells a story of how special each one of us, especially the sinner is to God. He tells a story which highlights the great length to which God goes to reconcile with the wayward and the lost. God leaves no stone unturned. God goes above and beyond. God even does the unthinkable-yes, offering His beloved son for the sake of lost sinner.

I often tell a story of two soldiers who fought side-by-side during the Second World War. One of them got shot. And as he realized the depth of his wound and faced his own mortality, he tore the dog chain hanging around his neck, and gave it to his buddy who was trying very hard to save his life. The dying soldier told his friend, when you survive this war and go back home, take this dog chain to my town, and look for Mrs. X., and when you find her, tell her that everything she taught me at Sunday School, now makes perfect sense. Fortunately, this soldier friend survived the war, and when he returned to the States, he went to his buddy's little town and looked for Mrs. X. When he found her, he gave her the dog chain, and the message. Mrs. X's was amused, her response was "But he never paid attention in Sunday School. He was always jumping around and distracting other kids." Oh yes, he may never have paid attention in Sunday School, but there was one thing he got out of Sunday School. And in the end, that was all that mattered-in the end that was the most meaning and fulfilling piece of information which he could rest his faith on-and that is, he was treasured by God, and for his sake, God sent his son to die for him. He found himself lost at the point of death, but there at that moment, right there did he find himself-the joy of being found is indescribable.

This is the simple truth-to live, is to feel oneself as being lost. The one who accepts that he or she is lost, has already begun the journey to find the self. Just like someone who has experienced a shipwreck, he or she begins to look for something to which to cling because whatever he or she clings unto, will bring order into the chaos of their life.

Consider yourself to be shipwrecked, to what would you be clinging to? Consider yourself to be lost. Consider yourself as having veered off from the rest of the flock. Henri Nouwen writes “How am I to let myself be loved by God? God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me and longing to bring me home.” Home is where you belong, that’s where the rest of the fold is, and God’s free gift of love support your life at every moment. Rely on it, God’s precious one. Depend on it, and trust it to bring you safely home with joy. Amen.