

Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church

Sermon title: "Searching for the Lost"

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10; Ezekiel 34:1-6, 11-16; Psalm 119:169-176

Hymns: Come thou fount of every blessing (insert); Jesus loves me, this I know 373;

Softly and tenderly 640; Lord Jesus, you shall be my song 665

July 13, 2014

Rev. Steve Filyk

I was surprised when mom said no.

It was never strange for our family
To have friends join us for sleepovers.

It was never unusual for us
To head over to other folk's homes
For the same.

So when I asked her if I could spend the nite
At Robert's place
I was shocked when mom said no.

I mean there was nothing else on the schedule.
And I hadn't been misbehaving.
But she was adamant that I was not permitted to go.

I was surprised.
And I was confused.
You see, my mom gave me no explanation.

Which made me wonder
If it had something to do with Robert's family:

Robert's older brother was wild,
Robert's father wasn't around much.
And the whole family
Lived on the 'wrong side of the tracks',
(that's Saskatchewan talk for being poor).

You might say my mom was prejudice.
But I think she was just trying to protect me.

We all know that bad company corrupts good character.
And so we guard our children and grandchildren
From the negative influences that lurk nearby.

We all know that bad company corrupts good character.
Even as adults
We try to avoid the bad apples.

But can we also agree that bad company
Would benefit from good influences?

Do we ever get to a point in our lives
where we are willing to risk rubbing shoulders
with those who have poor reputations,
with those who are looked down on,
in the hopes that something good might rub off?

Today's Gospel lesson
is taken from the Gospel of Luke.

Previous to our reading
Jesus has been preaching about God's kingdom,
Teaching about what it means to be his follower.

People are coming out to listen and learn from Jesus.
However it's not the crowd you might expect:
Among the religious studies majors, the Sunday school teachers,
Are swarms of tax-collectors and sinners.

The city's bad apples have come to listen and learn from Jesus
And Jesus doesn't reject doesn't turn them away.

By report of the religious leaders
We are told that Jesus is welcoming them
Even sitting down for supper with them.

This causes a stir.
You see, the scribes and Pharisees:

"loved God and lived in the hope
 [that the Messiah was coming to] redeem Israel.
 Their role in that coming was to study,
 obey, interpret, and apply the law of Moses.

Keeping the law
 would prepare the way
 for the coming redemption"ⁱ

But here was Jesus, welcoming all the law-breakers,
 People who were opposing God's plans and purposes.
 People who were standing in the way of this redemption
 (or so they thought).

Because Jesus welcomed these people
 The scribes and Pharisees complained about him.

What our lesson tells us
 Is that Jesus hears their accusation,
 Jesus considers their challenge.

And Jesus responds to it with not one,
 Or two,
 But three parables.

On commentator notes that this is:
 "the only recorded time
 Jesus ever told three parables in a row.

Generally, He would perceive some misunderstanding
 in the minds of people,
 size it up,
 and tell a story that would clarify the issue.

Then He'd go on until He saw the next area that needed attention.

But not this time.
 This particular day
 Jesus was so upset over the discussion
 the religious leaders were having

about who matters to God and who doesn't,
 that He said, in effect,

"I'm going to clear this up once and for all.
 ...I'm going to tell you not one, not two,
 but three stories — rapid fire —
 to make sure everybody understands
 who really matters to God."ⁱⁱ

Jesus tells three parables.
 Stories taken from everyday life.

We'll limit today's exploration
 To the first two:
 The story of a lost sheep and a lost coin.

Like most of Jesus' parables these parables
 Destabilise and disorient in order to challenge
 Hardened ways of thinking.

First of all Jesus invites those religious leaders
 To put themselves in the role of a shepherd.

"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?"ⁱⁱⁱ

Taking such a perspective
 would be a little off-putting for those Pharisees.
 "Tending sheep was one of the occupations
 avoided by observant Jews
 [shepherds don't get to church on Sunday]...".^{iv}

But the challenge goes further.
 Jesus invites those religious leaders
 To consider the circumstance of a particular woman:

"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?"^v

Taking such a perspective

Would be equally challenging to these leaders
Considering that their daily prayer included thanksgiving
For not being made a woman."^{vi}

Jesus answers the accusations of the religious leaders
By proposing two scenarios
That are both simple and subversive.

Two scenarios

That demonstrate the common,
The proper response to loss.

Those who have lost items of value
Go out and search for them.
They search until those items are restored.
And when they have found what is lost
they celebrate.

Pretty simple, right?

But by giving these examples Jesus
Is challenging the authorities
To reconsider just what they value.

If a person will search far and wide for a lamb
Then how far should they go for their neighbour?

If a person would turn their house upside-down
For a coin, worth a day's wage,
What should they do for a child of God?

But maybe Jesus's comparison
Glosses over some of the difficulties...
I mean it's not so simple is it?

When your cat goes missing
You can lure them into your arms with a treat.
But when someone has left the fold
It's really a different situation.

It is always risky to get involved with people
Especially when they are mixed up in the wrong things.
And even if you have the courage to do so,
Your venture is always a gamble.

Sheep may be stubborn,
But people will make up their own minds
About their life's direction.

If you want to persuade them to choose a different path
A better path
They will need to be patiently loved
And persuaded.

When it comes to winning over people
Especially those who have made a few bad choices,
You are faced with a difficult challenge.

The risk is high, the pursuit is costly,
And the chance of success isn't that great.
Maybe that's why the church rarely does it.

Thankfully God wasn't worried about the difficulties
When he sent Jesus to save us.
He sent his one and only Son.

Thankfully Jesus wasn't worried about the challenge
Of showing us God's love.
He went to hell and back!

The parables that Jesus tells the religious leaders
Speak less of how we respond to loss
And speaks more of how God responds to us.

It doesn't matter to God
How far down the wrong road we've gone.
God will come searching for us
No matter what it takes.

This parable helps us see how much God loves us.
But it also challenges how we respond to others.

Bill Hybels,
Founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church,
Speaks of struggling with this passage
And trying to come to grips with its implications.

"I was doing my workouts at a fitness center
that had just hired a recent immigrant from India.
He was a short, bald guy who spoke broken English
and was a little quirky.

On top of that, he was a devout Muslim.
In other words, he wasn't the kind of person
I'd have envisioned as a regular golf partner.

But over time I noticed that a lot of the guys at the club
didn't want anything to do with this man.
Their actions made it clear that he was,
to them, a "no count."

There I was, seeing this and trying to grapple
with what it means when Jesus says all people matter to Him...

So I started, rather awkwardly at first,
to make efforts to befriend him.

We talked, we kidded around,
we gradually built some rapport.

Finally one afternoon I gave him a Bible.
And guess what?
The next time I saw him
he gave me a Koran!

One day I went to the club
after I had been away on a speaking trip.
As I was getting dressed to go running,
this man came up to me
with an anxious look on his face.

He said, "Mr. Bill, while you were gone
something terrible happened.
My wife left me,
and now I'm all alone.

I just don't know what I'm going to do!"

While he was talking,
I remembered that he had a small child.
It was easy to see the pain he was in,
and I think I was the first person
he had talked to about this.

As he went on explaining what had happened,
I looked into his eyes,
and I sensed that the Holy Spirit was leading me
to reach out and embrace this man.

...I called one of those internal time-outs
and said to the Lord,
"Hold on a minute!
Let's not get carried away!"

I told God I had two basic problems with this leading.
The first was that I'm not a naturally affectionate person,
particularly with men!

I'm standing there in the middle of the locker room
 in my boxer shorts,
 God's telling me to hug this guy,
 and I'm thinking,
 "So how much does this man matter, God?"

My second problem
 had to do with this man's religious orientation.

I said, "You are aware, Lord, that this fellow you want me to hug
 is more than merely a nonworshiper.
 He is actively worshiping the competition!"

... I felt as though the Spirit was saying,
 "I know all about it, Bill.

But I want this man to know
 in the middle of his pain
 that he matters...

I'm just looking for one of My children
 to communicate that to him.
 Will you do it for Me?"

I've got to tell you, it was not an easy step for me.
 But when I put my arms around the guy,
 he just broke down
 and flooded my shoulders with his tears.^{vii}

When we consider the great love
 God has shown us in Jesus
 Maybe it's not such a big risk
 To seek out the 'lost sheep' around us.

May God fill us with compassion and courage.
 Amen.

ⁱ Roger E. Van Harn "Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, Luke 15:1-10"
The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels 412

ⁱⁱ Hybels, Bill; Mittelberg, Mark (2008-09-09). *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (p. 18). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 15:3 NRSV

^{iv} John R. Donahue *The Gospel in Parable* 148,149

^v Luke 15:8 NRSV

^{vi} Roger E. Van Harn "Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C, Luke 15:1-10" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels* 412

^{vii} Hybels, Bill; Mittelberg, Mark (2008-09-09). *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (p. 21). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.