

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
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15 September 2019
XIII Trinity
Proper 19 RCL Year C
Jeremiah 4: 11-12, 22-28
Psalm 14
I Timothy 1: 12-17
Luke 15: 1-10**

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...

I lost a pair of jeans. Last night I was packing. I have to go to the States this evening and won't be with you next weekend but will be back the following weekend, and could not find a pair of jeans. Now I have several pair, to be honest, plenty to wear. But this particular pair is a stylish pair, comfortable, look nice and I have a lot of travel in the next few days and I really wanted to take them. I couldn't find them anywhere. I turned on the lights, swept through the house, searched carefully in all the drawers, the closets, the laundry, under the bed. I can't find them! And it's driving me crazy. I think, maybe, that when I was in Sevilla a few days ago I left them in a drawer in the hotel room. I haven't been able to call my friends and neighbors and rejoice that I found them...not sure that I would have. But the experience of losing something is very annoying. And focuses you. I was really focused on finding those jeans last night. I looked everywhere in the apartment. And kept thinking about where they might be. And didn't find them, and am still wondering where they are. I'll call the hotel in Sevilla today.

Undoubtedly everyone here has lost something. Your purse. Glasses. Keys. A piece of clothing. A wedding ring. Maybe a car in a parking lot. It really focuses you. We are oh so human. Some things are not such a big deal, a pair of jeans, a book, a pair of glasses, but some are. A checkbook. A cell phone, your mobile phone, el móvil. That focuses you. Your lifeline to information, to being in contact with other people, to reading the news, checking FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram. What if you couldn't get to that information, how would you feel?

Jesus knows how very human we are; that we don't listen very well and don't take instruction very well. So he very often uses parables to teach us lessons; to instruct us about God. This gospel story begins "All the tax collectors and sinners [were] coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'" And Jesus then goes on to tell these two parables: the lost sheep, and the lost coin. On first consideration, the two parables don't seem to follow very well the grumbling about him welcoming and eating with sinners.

But on closer inspection...there is a pattern in these parables — losing, searching, finding, and celebrating. To be fair to yesterday, I also wasn't sure where something else was. When I was

recently in the States for my mother's funeral I arranged a safe deposit box for some of my mother's valuables and I wasn't sure where I had put the key. I looked in the couple of places I thought it was, and then relooked in one of them and found it. And I texted my friend Chip in the US: Found it! The losing, searching, finding, and celebrating pattern is real. We are oh so human and Jesus knows us so well.

So what is Jesus telling us with these two parables and coupling that with hanging out with tax collectors and sinners and yes, eating with them? The first lesson is that we are all valued. The shepherd goes in search of the one lost sheep, with ninety nine still behind. The woman searches for one lost coin, still having nine. None of us, none of us, is beneath being valued by God. We may not value each other very much, and may not think much of 'others', but God's perspective is different. As Amy-Jill Levine wrote in her book *Short Stories by Jesus*, "Jesus understands that God does not play by our rules. His God is a generous God, who not only allows the sun to shine on both the just and the unjust, but also gives us the ability to live into what should be rather than what is." She goes on to say, "The parables help us with their lessons about generosity: sharing joy, providing for others, recognizing the potential of small investments."

Small investments in each other. In loving each other. Jesus tells us over and over how valuable we are to God. He says that even the hairs on our heads are counted. He says to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and asks, are we not more valuable to the Father than those. Each of us is precious in His sight. So when one is lost, forgotten, downtrodden, abused, sinful, God is focused on searching for us like searching for a lost sheep, or a lost coin, or blue jeans, or keys, or iPhone, or ... These parables are telling us that the pattern of losing, searching, finding and celebrating, is God's pattern. We are always taken back. We are always valued by God. Each and every one of us. And God rejoices in that.

And the other lesson here is that if God values each of us like that, aren't we also to so value each other? If we are made in God's image shouldn't we be treating each other like God? Treat one another with the same value and respect and care as the lost sheep or the lost coin, or God.

One of the things that I try to live into is to treat and value each person I meet with respect and consideration. At the grocery store, on the street, in a restaurant, in a social situation. I try to make that person feel valued. When someone is asking for money on the street, I try to give them a smile, and engage them a bit, a warm hello, as I give them something, or not. But I can always give them a smile and a nod. And in restaurants I am very intentional about knowing the names of the servers in the restaurants I frequent. Actually I write their names down on a list in my iPhone and review it before going back to a place where I frequent.

For there was a quote that deeply affected me a number of years ago. It is by the very famous African American writer Maya Angelou. She says, "I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Knowing that we are precious to God, loved, will be searched for when lost and rejoiced when found, how does God make us feel. And how do we make others feel?

Amen.