

July 5, 2020

*"The Lost Coin"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Luke 15:8-10

Rev. Rebecca Mincieli, 508-548-3050

Well, here we are celebrating the 4th of July! Now I can't be sure of your exact feeling, but I can tell you mine. And that is, I am still very proud to be an American. I'm still proud that I'm a citizen of these great United States with all the democratic values and freedoms on which it was founded, in spite of all that is happening, some of it justified, some of it not – like the defacing and tearing down of statues of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. So I thought it would be appropriate to tell you a story about George Washington that some of those people exercising their rights may not know. Washington, the “father of our country,” was born in 1732 and died in 1799, sixty-seven short years on this earth. But he accomplished more than most men and women: he was a general who defeated the British, our first president - although he could have been king as many wanted him to be – but he was also, savior of the early republic. Now what do I mean by 'savior of the republic'? Well, it's a little known story, but in 1783, after the Revolutionary War, a group of officers planned a military coup, an overthrow, of our new country because they had not been paid by Congress as promised. So Washington went to meet with them, and to read a prepared letter by a members of the Congress. But after reading a portion of the letter with his eyes squinting at the small writing, Washington suddenly stopped. His officers stared at him, wondering. Washington then reached into his coat pocket and took out a pair of glasses. He had fought and suffered with them during the war for eight long and grueling years, and few of them even knew he wore glasses, so they were surprised. “Gentlemen,” said Washington, “You will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but nearly blind in the service of our country.” It was a single moment of sheer vulnerability by this great man. And at that moment, Washington's men were deeply moved, shamed at their selfish acts of defiance against the country. Many were quickly brought to tears. For they were now looking with great empathy and affection at this man who had led them through so much and who had sacrificed so much. Washington read the remainder of the letter, then left without saying another word. The officers then cast a unanimous vote, essentially agreeing to the rule of Congress. Thus, the new civilian government was preserved and the experiment of democracy now embodied in these United States of America, was able to move forward.

That's just one reason why I'm so grateful for George Washington and all our other brave "founding fathers" for what occurred nearly a quarter of a century ago. And I'm grateful for the brave men and women who serve and protect us to this very day. Including our police men and women. Because

without them and their dedication and sacrifices, we wouldn't be able to stand here today in peace and freedom worshipping on this beach/in this place. That's why I think it's important for us to be on guard and not become frivolous with this gift of freedom we've been given, or become misguided or get lost in our thinking. Because as citizens of the United States, we must uphold the awe-inspiring intent on which this country was created in the first place. Which was, and listen with new ears: to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

And as we consider this, I think it's equally important for us to remember that as citizens, first and foremost, of God's kingdom, we must uphold the awe-inspiring intent for which we were created. And that is, to be in relationship with our Maker, our Creator God. Let me repeat - God's intent is for us to be in a relationship with him, our Creator God. A relationship that our Maker wants to be rooted in love. John 3:16 tells us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life." No other verse in the Bible so beautifully summarizes God's relationship with humanity and His utmost love for us. Yes, God loved the world so much, that even with all its brokenness, its chaos, its suffering, God thought it essential to come, himself, in the form of Jesus Christ to be with us, you and me, in the midst of it all. So that God's teachings might guide you in your everyday living. So that God's peace might get you through the turmoil of life. So that God's wisdom would help you in your decision making. So that God's light could shine in and through you so that you affect others in a positive way. So that you might live your life, meaningfully and abundantly, now and forever. Doesn't this verse tell us that not only are we loved by God, but even this difficult world is worth loving? Even the protestors, even the police... I think so.

But the truth is – sometimes we get so caught up in what's happening around us, we lose sight of our intent, we lose sight of God's love. The news is depressing on a 24/7 basis. The pandemic has dampened our collective spirits. We're not supposed to see our families, or hug our grandchildren, or do the things we want to do. And so we feel lost. Lost in the crazy culture, lost in our thoughts, lost as to where life is headed. And then we feel lost in just the normal issues – family pressures, bills, health problems, loneliness. Some of us feel lost as to how to make a change in our life, lost as to what decisions we need to make, lost as to the meaning and the value of our lives.

But that's why today's parable can bring us such great relief. Let me explain. St. Luke puts this parable right after the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and right before the Parable of the Prodigal, the Lost Son. All these parables are about how God will never give up on us but will continue to seek out and search for his lost ones, you and me. These three parables that make up chapter fifteen of St. Luke's Gospel, constitute what may well be the most hopeful chapter in the entire Bible. Evangelist Uldine Utley calls Luke 15, "God's Lost and Found Department." Pastor J. Ellsworth Kalas writes about Luke 15 by saying, "Jesus begins this series of stories in a very personal way. 'Which of you,' he asks, pointing an inquiring finger at those in the circle of listeners, 'if he had a hundred sheep and loses one of them doesn't go out to look for that lost one? And when he finds it, he is joyful. He wraps the little lamb around his shoulders and carries it home. And then he calls together his friends and neighbors to celebrate, because the lost sheep has been found.' Everyone in the crowd recognizes the scene. The men especially, because to them the sheep represent a source of food and clothing. Then Jesus directed his attention to the women. 'Suppose, a woman had 10 silver coins, and lost one.' All the women immediately knew this was a serious loss. A silver coin represented a day's wages in that first century world, where most people struggled to survive from one day to the next."<sup>1</sup>

As you can see, these two parables, just like the parable of the prodigal son that I will be speaking about in the next few weeks, all have the same basic plot line. Something extremely precious is lost, someone searches until the lost is found, and then there's a celebration. And as we listen to these stories we can't help but realize that the lost sheep, coin, son or daughter is us, and the seeker of the lost is – God. And that is good news. For like I said, it assures us that not only does God love us, but God wants to be in relationship with us and will stop at nothing to make this happen.

Now wherever you might be in your life's journey, or whatever may be troubling you, I want to give you one more important detail about the Parable of the Lost Coin that makes it even more reassuring for us. And that one detail focuses on the coin itself. The coin that was lost was a coin of the realm, a coin of the state. Yes, it was a silver coin, but it could have been a penny, a quarter, or even a simple piece of paper called a ten or twenty dollar bill. And the reason the coin had value was because of the stamp on it. At that time it was the image of Caesar. For us today, it is the stamp of our country, the United States of America. And that is what gives it its true worth. You see, money is not simply a medium of exchange for our commercial purposes. It is equally a testimony to the prestige and power and validity

---

<sup>1</sup> Parables from the Backside, J. Ellsworth Kalas

of that which is associated with it. And so, let me ask, is the value of a coin lessened because it is lost?<sup>2</sup> Is the value of a quarter dropped in a parking lot, or a dollar bill blowing along the beach worth less than a quarter or dollar bill in your pocket? Of course not. True, lost on the ground, or lost in a parking lot may cause the coin to become unused, tarnished, worn or even encrusted with filth. But it is a coin of our country none the less, still as valuable as the day it was first minted. And in this parable, Jesus compares us to a coin. A coin that may be lost at times, but a coin that is of value. Yes, we, you and I have value, we are worth something, we are precious, because of what is stamped on us. And that, is the image of God. We all, everyone, bear the stamp of our Creator. The Bible tells us that at the very beginning: “God created humankind in his image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female he created them.”

You know, we have a God that tells us over and over again just how much He loves us, through His words and promises in the Bible. And as we sit outside, reveling in God’s creation, in God’s presence, just listen to his words to you. “See how great a love I have for you that you should be called my children, for this is what you are. I knit you together in your mother’s womb. I know the number of hairs on your head. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Come to me all who are weary and struggling and feeling weighed down, let me take your burden from you, and ease your heavy load. Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, with prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to me. I know the plans I have for you – plans for good and not harm, to give you a future and a hope. I cause all things to work together for good to those who love me and are called to my purpose. So do not fear, for I will never leave you or forsake you. I have called you by name, you are mine. You are precious in my sight and I love you.” Amen

---

<sup>2</sup> The Teachings of Jesus in Parables, George Hubbard