

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

**The Lost Coin
(Celebrating the Lord's Supper)**

Sept 4, 2011

**Psalm 149 and Luke 15:8-10
(Hymns – 474, 20, 534, 557)**

Do you remember those bi-focals I talked about last week?
These ones?

I commented on how difficult it has been to adjust
to a new way of seeing things.

And I felt that seeing God in a new way
was at the heart of these parables about loss in Luke.

Well, this week I kept losing these glasses.

I did find them eventually –

that's obvious because here they are.

And I was not imitating a loving gracious God in seeking them.

I was angry with myself for misplacing them yet again.

I was frustrated at having to take time to look for them
just as I was rushing off to do something else.

And because I was rushing about,
there was no time to really celebrate them being found.

It wasn't until I sat down

to pull my considerations together into this sermon
that I recognized the lessons the Spirit was offering me
in my experiences of loss, pursuit, and celebration.

There was an invitation to see and act differently,
a call to action to be more consciously intimate with Jesus Christ
in my attitudes and behaviours.

Loss, pursuit, and celebration –

that is the basic plot line of all three of these parables
in the 15th chapter of Luke

as Jesus' teaches the crowds in the presence of the Pharisees.

We looked last week at the God who pursues,
the God whose Spirit is constantly at work
providing opportunities for the lost to recognize their plight
and return home to intimacy with God.

That is where true human life flourishes – in intimacy with God.
And in and through Jesus Christ,
God has removed whatever barriers there might have been
to re-establishing that intimacy.
We are found, we are forgiven, we are freed.
It's time to celebrate by responding in gratitude to such grace.

But where do human beings get lost?
Where do we lose touch with our intimate relationship with God,
with the original blessing God intended us to enjoy.

Let's look at three such places this morning –
fear, despair, and loneliness.
The boundaries between these places of lostness often blur.
The feelings associated with each place pile on top of one another.
The darkness builds and blocks out the light of Jesus Christ.

These are the places that lie behind
some of the most powerful contrasts in the Scriptures –
light and darkness, new and old, slave and free,
victory and defeat, life and death.

When we succumb to darkness, old ways, slavish behaviour,
defeatism, and death,
we choose to live in fear, despair, and loneliness.

Ten years ago today, what became known as simply "9/11" happened.
No one had imagined such an act of terrorism –
four planes simultaneously on suicide missions,
two of the tallest buildings in the world collapsed,
the very heart of the American military attacked,
the greatest power in the world mesmerized and terrorized.

I remember talking with a friend who was at the airport that morning.
She saw the events being telecast on the monitors.
She thought it was one of those exaggerated disaster movies,
but was a little puzzled
as to why they would show that particular disaster in an airport.
It didn't occur to her that it was actually happening for several minutes.
But it was happening and it changed the world.

Fear, despair, and loneliness
have reached new proportions in the Western world since that day.
The attitude that drives this proportional change in our world is fear.
Despair and loneliness are its constant companions,
but the driving attitude is fear.

The Greek word for *fear* is *phobeo*.
It is associated with panic, fright, apprehension, and anxiety.
The reasons for this kind of fear in the Scriptures
are mostly war, death, enslavement, loss of a loved one, or a disaster.
These are things that threaten love, hope, and belonging.

In the God revealed by Jesus Christ,
the God with whom we are restored to intimacy in the grace of Jesus Christ,
we are found by the love that casts out this kind of fear.
That's the love that inspires the pursuers and welcomers
in these three parables in Luke.
It is the love that is more powerful than anything that can hurt us.
It is the love that inspires that resounding assurance from Paul in Romans:

*For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love:
neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers,
neither the present nor the future,
neither the world above nor the world below
- there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us
from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:38-39)*

Lots of things arouse fear in us.
In response to some we tremble in the very depths of our beings.
But there is a force, an energy, that calms that quaking.
It is the love of God in Jesus Christ made available to us through the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel message in the face of fear is simple.
Overcome fear with love.
Replace despair with hope.
Eliminate loneliness with belonging.
These blessings are so simple that they are often dismissed
as silly, or unrealistic, or idealistic, and or downright dangerous.

But deep in our souls, as we are nourished to flourish by the Holy Spirit,
we know love, hope, and belonging are the greatest gifts
that emerge from our restored intimacy with God in Jesus Christ.
We know that we have been found by the One bearing those gifts
in the midst of our fear, despair, and loneliness.
And we know the only appropriate response is to come to the banquet,
as we do now at the Lord's Supper.