

Lost ~ September 14, 2010
Luke 15:1-10; Psalm 14 9-12-2010

In spite of its title, this sermon is not going to be about the television series, “Lost.” For some reason or another, I did not even see one episode of it, although I know it was very popular. I suspect its premise was very different from that found in our parables for this morning.

We know that Jesus chose to deliver many of his words of wisdom in the form of parables, which are “earthly stories with a heavenly meaning,” or so I was told many years ago in Sunday school. He chose this format to make the message he hoped to deliver crystal clear to his listeners so that they could understand the best way to follow him in developing a better understanding of God and God’s will for their lives. We need to remember that most of his earliest followers were not well-educated folks. His mission was to help them find and follow a way of life that would lead them to spiritual abundance. Often, this required simple words and illustrations.

He had no intention of having his followers put him on a pedestal, out of reach, and have them make him an object of worship. His way was a hands-on-way of living life and serving those around him. In all of his actions and interactions he always pointed beyond himself to God.

Jesus knew that there are many ways for people to become lost in life, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. All of them came to him for healing. He also knew that very often they wander, like sheep, from the pathway set before them. They turn their backs on the safety of the sheep-fold and take off in a direction that they believe is the best for them, often thinking that the “grass is always greener on the other side of the fence or flock.” My mother often told me that that “greener grass” was, most likely, growing over a septic tank. Many who have wandered away seeking greener pastures have discovered the truth in this. When their feet begin to get a bit messy and they find themselves up to their knees in muck, they may decide they are going in the wrong direction. Sometimes they turn their lives around and find their way back, sometimes they don’t.

If they are blessed, they do find their way back, like the Prodigal Son, another parable found in the gospel of Luke. No one came looking for the son, who had wasted his inheritance, and who had been reduced to a survival state, but we can be fairly certain that he was in his father’s prayers on a daily basis. We are told that this young man “came to himself,” swallowed his pride and his belief that he had all the answers and returned home to a warm welcome and his father’s loving embrace.

Many people “come to themselves” after a time of testing and trial. This may seem to take a long time especially if you are a parent and it is your child who has gone astray. I have a friend who is at his wit’s end waiting for his son to “see the light.” He is in one mess after another. The father can only hope his son will begin to see how he has drifted away from the basic set of values his parents gave him and decide to turn his life around.

This first parable reminds us that there will be much rejoicing over the person who finds his or her way back, who turns from a way that does not follow the precepts of our faith and who begins to see anew the way in which he or she needs to live and move and

have his or her being. God always keeps the door open for those who have chosen to go astray. We are the ones who turn away, never our Creator. We are the ones who, in our willfulness, separate ourselves until there comes a day when we finally understand what is just and right and beautiful.

There are other times that we might just bounce away like a coin falling out of someone's hand. Life may deal us a jolt and we are gone, lost, rolling away from all we have known. We don't always choose to take off in this manner, but it happens, and we may find ourselves rolling into a corner of pain, fear and resentment. We lose the ability to live and love. We lose the ability to trust. We lose the ability to make a plan that will enable us to put one foot in front of the other and walk out of our mess.

We might think we will find solace in drugs or drink or in depression or in a lot of whining and a lot of "woe is me." Quite often we become such miserable humans that no one wants to spend any time with us. So we sit, alone not knowing which way to turn. Then, out of nowhere, if we are lucky, comes a hand reaching for us, picking us up, dusting us off and carrying us back into life rejoicing that we have been found. Through the kindness of others, we discover that we have value that begins to shine through whatever layers of isolation we have chosen to wrap around ourselves. We learn that we are precious and cherished—just as that one lost coin was precious to the woman who looked high and low for it and, upon finding it carried it to her friends rejoicing. We do not know the value of the coin and that does not matter—what had been lost was found.

Often in the hurly burley of life, we forget that we are precious. Our fellow humans may not have time for us, or patience with us and we may feel we have to deal with life all alone. But, this is never so. When we feel lost our faith tells us that our God is always watching and waiting for our return—a true cause for rejoicing.

-- *Amen*