



When I was a kid I loved playing “kick the ball”. It was similar to a game of hide-and-seek. One person was chosen to kick the ball. Then everyone would scatter and hide, while the person who was “it” would have to chase down the ball, put it on home base, then go searching for everyone who scattered when the ball was kicked. The one who was searching would never give up until everyone was found.

In today’s gospel reading we hear 2 stories about searching and finding. Read Luke 15: 1-10

Jesus first tells the parable of the lost sheep. A lost sheep in the Judean wilderness was doomed. It had no protection and it would be only a short time before a predator would attack and kill it. A lost dog might eventually find its way home, but a lost sheep is unable to do so.

In the case of the lost sheep, the shepherd, took whatever time he needed to search for his lost sheep. He had to expose himself to the dangers of the wilderness and the weather. The same predators that were stalking his sheep might stalk him as well. He had to go without sleep because the longer the sheep remained lost, the greater the risk of its being destroyed.

In the case of the woman and her coin, everything was set aside until she found that coin. Her shopping would have to wait. Her meal preparation was postponed. She didn’t go to the well to draw water and chat with her neighbors. She didn’t go to the stream to wash her laundry. Her one consuming focus was on looking for that lost coin, no matter how much effort it took.

The shepherd leaves his 99 other sheep and goes after the lost one, searching until He finds it. The woman who lost her coin sets aside all her other work and diligently

searches until she finds it. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who described His mission as “to seek and to save that which was lost. Everyone knows that no shepherd would ever go after 1 sheep and leave the 99. Sheep aren’t that valuable. And no woman would spend everything she had looking for a lost coin. They aren’t that valuable. And who would throw a party for one such lost sheep or coin. No one! No one except Jesus. And Jesus does everything to go after those who are lost.

Jesus tells these stories to 2 groups of people. One group was well aware that they were lost. The other group Jesus was speaking to had no idea they were lost. They were upstanding citizens that were well respected, they never see themselves as lost.

A few weeks ago a family was visiting the Mall of America amusement park. When they were getting ready to leave they noticed their youngest was not to be found. His mother and grandmother immediately each took a direction to run and search for him. That drive to find her son took over. She was not going to stop until she found her son. His mother found him in a store. He was talking with the clerks, having a conversation that only a three year old could muster up. His mom saw him, much to her relief. His mom came running up to him, I found you, I am so happy I found you. Only to hear these words from her son, “ I not lost mama, I right here.

What does being lost look like? There are so many ways we can be lost. We can feel like our faith isn’t strong enough, we can feel like we aren’t good enough, we can struggle with depression, anxiety illness and pain. It is in those times we know we are lost. The opposite is true as well. Those who are often most lost have no idea that they are lost. Because being lost is being disconnected from God, ourselves and others. We believe that we have control of our lives, that we are self sufficient. That we can do all that life brings on our own. God can seem like a good idea, one we can go to if needed, but not a necessity in our daily living. That is when we are really lost, because we don’t even know it.

It is in those times, when we are lost, whether we realize it or not God’s never failing love seeks us out. God runs after us, reaches out to us and celebrates when we are no longer lost. It is God’s love that comes to us in our darkest times to bring us light. It is God’s love seeking us out that brings hope when we are hopeless.

Matt Chandler tells the story of Dave Karnes. When the World Trade Center tumbled to the ground on 9/11 that

dreadfully dark day, more than 3000 people lost their lives. But a few who were buried beneath the rubble miraculously survived. Two of these were Will and John, a pair of Port Authority employees who responded to the attack and were on the bottom floor as the south tower fell. Trapped without water and breathing smoke filled air, both men had little hope for survival. Yet as they lay there under a mountain of debris, something was stirring inside an accountant in Connecticut. Dave Karnes who spent 23 years in active duty in the Marines, was watching the scene play out on TV like the rest of us. But more than just allowing it to trouble him, he decided to do something about it. While rescue workers were being called off the site, Dave found another Marine, the two joined forces and walked the pile of debris together, seeking to find life. After an hour of searching, they heard the faint tapping on metal pipes. It was Will and John who had been trapped for nine hours. Dave began to dig and found these two men. Dave Karnes stepped into the despair and darkness of Ground Zero and found life.

This is what God does for us when we are lost. God steps into our darkness. There are times we don't even realize that we are buried in the depths and rubble in our own lives with zero chance of pulling ourselves out of our own condition. We are never without hope because Jesus will continue to seek us out, to rescue us. God is relentless in seeking us out. God seeking us out has nothing to do with how we got in our situation. It has everything to do with God's desire to seek us out unconditionally, all the time. How does God do this?

Jesus does this seeking through you and through me. Jesus has called us to be his instruments in seeking those who are lost. Those who need to experience and hear the words of love, hope and healing.

Here are 2 stories that I heard one Wednesday night from 2 parents talking while their kids were in choir at Prince of Peace.

A grade school boy with special needs was living in an apartment with his mom, sister and grandfather. There were only 3 beds, so the little boy slept on the couch. One of his teachers knew of the situation and it dawned on her that she had an extra mattress at her house and thought she could give it to the boy. When she was explaining what she wanted to do to the principal another person overheard and said, "I have a bedframe that isn't being used, do you want that too?" It was delivered to the boys home, put in the room with his grandpa. He had a bed and had no idea where it came from there was rejoicing.

A woman was closing a real estate deal. During the closing the elder woman began to share her memories of the house. As the relator listened, the woman opened up more and more. The elder woman hadn't shared all of these thoughts and memories with her family. She didn't feel she could, so she opened up to the woman, the relator sitting across the table from her. Together, they cried, held hands and smiled. The relator was Jesus to the elder woman. And when they were done talking, they hugged and laughed. There was rejoicing!

You and I have been called as the body of Christ to bring hope and wholeness to those who are lost. And Jesus puts people in our lives to seek us out when we are lost. Jesus works in and through us to reach out to seek those who are lost. And then there is no stopping the rejoicing!