

“Lost And Found”

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Epistle Lesson)

Luke 15:1-10 (Gospel Lesson)

I've had people ask me how I develop my message each week, how and when do I start and how do I know what direction it will lead me. One thing you need to know, I try it out on myself several times before you hear it on Sunday.

I start my next sermon when I finish the last one. In other words, on Sunday afternoon or evening I start reading the Scriptures I've selected for the next Sunday. I read them several times. I pray over them, asking God to speak to me through them. I read commentaries, my old sermons on that particular Scripture, other people's sermons and I have extensive files for illustrations as well as books on about any subject. And then I kind of live with them for a few days before I try to formulate anything on paper.

This past week I did my sermon planning for the month of October. I selected some Scriptures, read them over, and tried to come up with a catchy title. And then I shared them with those who need to know here in the church for their own planning. Lynne asked me about a particular week and some music, asking what direction I would be going in. I had to be totally honest and tell her I probably wouldn't know my direction until that week rolled around.

If I would have known a month ago where my heart and mind were I probably would have switched the Scriptures I chose for today. In my first reading, Paul's letter to his young protégé Timothy, He shares that he

Page 1

is thankful for Jesus Christ and the second chance he has granted him by finding him faithful and appointing him for service in His kingdom. Man, I could have written that, or it could be said of me.

My last church turned down the person the Bishop originally wanted to replace me with. Their excuse? Well, they said, she has a bit of a shady past. My response, "If you knew my past you would have turned me down too!"

I've heard people say they don't go to church because it's full of hypocrites and sinners. Well, where else should we be? You might notice that I include myself in that mix. Another response might be, "Yes, but there's still room for one more." You see, at some point everyone fails, for none of us can learn anything without making some mistakes. It's called free will.

What happens in church every Sunday is that a bunch of sinners gather to look and listen to one big sinner. Do I need to explain your role in this scenario?

A preacher friend of mine said that he attended a conference once and they handed him a card with **1 Timothy 1:12** on it. He thought it must be a mistake. But after thinking about it, over the years, he's had hundreds of these cards printed. He puts them in notes he sends to preachers—hands them out when he speaks at clergy events—keeps one in his car—one on his

desk—and one in his sock drawer at home just to encourage and remind himself.

I thank God most every day for His call on my life and everywhere He has planted me to sow His seeds. I know that if it wasn't His call, I wouldn't be

Page 2

able to do the things I do in ministry. Or as Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”** Praise God!

Luke text

So, if I were putting together a sinners table at the Huddle House, it might include a child molester, an arms dealer, a garbage collector, a young man with AIDS, a Laotian chicken plucker, a teenage crack addict, and an unmarried woman on welfare with five children by three different fathers. Did I miss anyone? Oh yea! Don't forget to put Jesus at the head of that table.

If this offends you even a little, then you are almost ready for what happens next. Because what happens next is the local ministerial association comes into the restaurant and sits down at a large table across from the sinners. The religious authorities all have good teeth and there is no dirt under their fingernails. When their food comes, they hold hands to pray. They

are all perfectly nice people, but they can hardly eat their hamburger steaks for staring at the strange crowd in the far booth.

The chicken plucker is still wearing her white hair net, and the garbage collector smells like spoiled meat. The addict can't seem to find his mouth with his spoon. But none of this is the heartbreaker. The heartbreaker is Jesus, sitting there as if everything were just fine. Doesn't He know what kind of message He is sending? Who is going to believe He speaks for God if He doesn't

Page 3

keep better company than this?

In our Gospel Lesson this morning the Pharisee's and the teachers of the law have their shorts all in a knot because Jesus **"Welcomes sinners and eats with them."** You see, in that culture, when you broke bread with someone it was a sacred thing and indicated a friendship. This is what always happens when religious people worship the Bible and *their* interpretation of the Bible, rather than hearing from God.

Unlike the teachers of the law, Jesus' goal was never simply to teach Scripture by drawing out rules for people to follow. The main subjects of Jesus' teaching were His Father, Himself, the Holy Spirit, the gospel, and the kingdom of God. He used the Scriptures, but He also used parables, His miracles, His wisdom, and prophecy to reveal the beauty of God and His kingdom. His miracles revealed the power and compassion of the Father and showed that the kingdom had come in the person of Christ.

This 15th chapter of Luke is one of the most important in the entire Bible. It includes three of the most famous parables ever told. Each of these parables deals with something that is lost—a lost sheep—a lost coin—and a lost son. It didn't matter to Jesus how those who were lost came to be where they were. All Jesus cared about was bringing them home.

It's important to note that in each of our parables this morning people go to extraordinary lengths to retrieve what is lost. You see, God not only loves us—He seeks us—He searches for us—and He saves us with a love that goes great lengths for us. No matter where you find yourself today—no matter

Page 4

how lost you think you might be—there is no place that we can wander which is beyond the loving reach of God.

Lost tells the tragedy of human life. I don't know about you, but I feel lost from time to time. Sometimes I wonder about my faith, about the world around me. I deal sometimes with sleeplessness, with anxiety, with feelings of depression. I question myself as to if I'm doing what God has called me to do and how well I am or aren't doing it. Quite frankly—I feel lost.

Rarely are we completely lost—and rarely are we completely found. There is always a part of us that needs to be led to the light—and there is always a part of us that is already there in the light. For some it is more and for some it is less—but always some part.

In the parable of the lost sheep Jesus is portrayed as the “Seeking Shepherd” while the parable of the lost coin represents the work of the Holy

Spirit diligently seeking every lost sinner. Both parables share about the celebration that takes place when what was lost is found.

First, we have the shepherd leaving the 99 as he searches for the one that is lost. What stands out to me are these words: **“Until he finds it.”** He doesn’t search for a little while and give up—he doesn’t search until lunch time and give up—he doesn’t search until he finds something better to do—he searches until he finds that which is lost.

Have you ever sent your child to look for something only to have them return in a few seconds saying that they couldn’t find it and then you go yourself and put your hands on it right away?

Page 5

We don’t have many shepherds in Georgia, do we? Well, I saw several when I went to Kenya on a mission trip. I saw children moving their flocks to the nearest watering hole. I heard the bray of sheep that had gotten separated from their flocks. And then one evening, as we were returning to the mission house, our guide, Michael, stopped and was conversing with someone alongside the road. It was dark and I couldn’t see real well and of course I had no idea what they were saying since they were speaking Swahili but when I looked closer, I saw that it was a shepherd with a sheep standing at his feet. This one lamb had wandered away from the flock and this shepherd had walked many miles to find it and bring it home. I can still picture it in my mind—that little lamb looking at her or his shepherd with that look of gratitude on its face.

The woman in our parable has lost a coin. For most of us this is an everyday occasion, to misplace something. We look high and low—we take the cushions out of the chairs and find \$9.38 in change along with the half a peanut butter sandwich we had been looking for. You check the trashcans (I actually had to do this once in the lobby of the Post Office). You check the lent traps and discover enough to knit an afghan. You look everywhere you can think of—and of course, you always find it in the last place you look.

This poor woman has lost a coin, not the loose coins we find when we do the laundry or straighten the cushions on the couch (I always consider that to be my pay). No, this coin for her would be like us losing a twenty-dollar bill. We wouldn't be serious about looking for loose coins, but for twenty dollars

Page 6

we might turn the house upside down. This woman looked diligently for her coin; and when she found it, she called all her friends and neighbors together to celebrate her finding.

The shepherd looked in the wilderness for his lost sheep—there are people out there in the wilderness who are lost! The woman looked in her home for her lost coin—there are people in our homes who are lost! We may have children living under our roofs who are lost, and I've experienced this firsthand.

There may be people right here in this room this morning who are lost—right here in the church. They attend Sunday School and worship services—but they are unsaved and thus lost—they don't know it—would never admit

it—but they are lost. The challenge for us as Christians is to be concerned—to help them seek the salvation needed for their souls.

If you are feeling a little lost—or you know someone who may be lost—I have good news for you this morning. Jesus came to our world to seek and save what was lost and He's asking for our help. God weeps over any of His children who are lost. That's why it's important that we get involved—it's our responsibility to assist the Shepherd in searching for His Lost Sheep, and the Woman searching for her Lost Coin.

And when we do, and when they are found, according to Jesus, there will be rejoicing in heaven and in the presence of the angels of God over just one sinner who repents.

Thanks be to God!