

# “Celebrating Connections”

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 & Luke 15:1-10

Pastor James York

September 15, 2019

If I were a painter, I would paint the parable of the found sheep as follows: A grumpy, stubborn, bitter, sick, ugly, sheep with matted wool full of burs, weeping eyes, brown teeth and a running nose. Jesus is rejoicing as he carries the vile sheep home. Jesus' hair is messed up and clothes tattered from the work Jesus does to bring us home. Jesus is smiling, yet you can see his tear stained cheeks from all the weeping Jesus does for us as we constantly run away.

**Luke 15:3-7 NLT “So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!”**

The prophet Jeremiah describes how being lost feels. **Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 NLT “My joy is gone. My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken. Listen to the weeping of my people; it can be heard all across the land. “Has the Lord abandoned Jerusalem?” the people ask. “Is her King no longer there?” “The harvest is finished, and the summer is gone,” the people cry, “yet we are not saved!” I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. Is there no medicine in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why is there no healing for the wounds of my people? If only my head were a pool of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night.”**

The medicine of Gilead is freely given to heal us. The concept Jeremiah is identifying is what God has given us in creation, in science, in our knowledge and creativity numerous ways of providing comfort and healing. Numerous ways for us to mend and celebrate our connections. Sadly, all of us, at times, make poor choices that create pain and disorient us. Sometimes we choose revenge over forgiveness, hate over love, blame over partnership. Sometimes we hoard instead of share, exclude instead of welcome, judge instead of appreciate diversity. Sometimes we decide to exaggerate, embellish, lie instead of being truthful. Sometimes we reject love instead of receiving grace, focus on our needs rather than being grateful for all we have received. The list goes on and on of poor choices we make that mess up our lives. God gave us this scripture so we can be certain that God sees our mess, pain, and broken connections. God is compassion, who is constantly loving to clean up our mess, heal and mend our connections. No matter how lost we become God never gives up on us. God finds us and brings us home. God gives us these scriptures, so we can be certain that we are never truly lost for God is always with us. God weeps with us over every tear we shed. God has endless compassion for us. God will bring each of us home.

I suspect you know well lost predicaments. Sometimes it is our circumstances. Sometimes it is our lifestyle. Leading a busy life, with one day after another blurring together. Scheduled to the hilt which brings a full load of stress. Then one day we collapse into a chair and wonder where all the time going. How will I ever get everything done? We feel lost and hopeless to ever get caught up? We seem so far away from the home of right priorities, Sabbath rest and abundant living. Sometimes it is our health, an injury or a disease and the doctor's words send us spiraling away from home. Or maybe we just can't seem to keep our weight under control and exercise, so we get lost in lethargic land. Sometimes it is our work. Huge demands, short deadlines, grumpy co-workers, unfulfilling work or the sense that you are not doing what you are called to do so work becomes a burden rather than a joy. Sometimes it is our studies, writing papers, reading, preparing for exams that overwhelm us. Sometimes we get lost in our relationships. We become out of sync with each other. We just can't seem to connect and soon we feel lost in separation. Sometimes separation comes from a move or death. Sometimes we get lost in an addiction, depression, grief, guilt or regret. Sometimes our finances implode. Sometimes we make a mistake, do something stupid, fail and get stuck. Sometimes we fixate on all that is wrong with our life and miss all the beauty. Sometimes we hit a dry spot in our spiritual life. It's not that we're ignoring God, we just can't seem to consistently perceive God or move beyond a question. We feel like we have

hit a dead end in our prayer life and worship is flat. Sometimes our thoughts turn negative and stampede through our mind trampling our joy. Sometimes we are in a slump. We all know what it feels like to be lost to struggle to receive the perfect peace, love and joy that God is pouring into us every moment.

**Luke 15:3 & 8-10 NLT “So Jesus told them this story: Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”**

Jesus tells us over and over in numerous ways that God’s compassionate, forgiving, healing, glorifying love will bring us home every time we are lost. Pastor HKO in Synthesis writes, “One of the most striking features in the twin parables of “The Lost Sheep” and “The Lost Coin” is that sheep and coins don’t repent. They don’t come to their senses and turn around and make a new start on their own. Unlike the prodigal son, they don’t get hungry, decide they have had enough, and reason out a plan to find their way back to where they ought to be. They don’t find themselves; they are found. The point here—and the point that always makes the righteous grumble in any and all religions—is that we are loved by God into repentance. We are saved by grace, costly grace and not by our half-baked, quasi-successful efforts at repentance.” God loves us into repentance. Notice the sequence in the parables. We are brought all the way home, surrounded with rejoicing love then repent. Furthermore, no mention is made of the sheep being brought back and put in a pen so it cannot wander away again. The coin is not put in a purse or a safe place.”

In our lost and hurting state Henri Nouwen urges us to be patient. “Patience is a hard discipline. It is not just waiting until something happens over which we have no control: the arrival of the bus, the end of the rain, the return of a friend, the resolution of a conflict. Patience is not waiting passively until someone else does something. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow. Later and somewhere else. Be patient and trust that the treasure you are looking for is hidden in the ground on which you stand.”

We are not fully home until we are with God in heaven however we can enjoy numerous glimpses of home here on earth, in our love for ourselves, each other and God. Home is glimpsed in the savoring of God’s blessings. Home is glimpsed in the moments we perceive God’s redeeming compassion. Home is glimpsed whenever we are filled with peace, joy and love.

As God is mending our connections, you are invited to savor and celebrate the connections you are currently enjoying. Your connection to God as a beloved, precious child, who belongs to God’s family; an heir, who will inherit all the majesty, grandeur and glory of God’s kingdom. Your connection to a passion, that inspires you, motivates you and fills you with joy. Your connection to creation that fills you with wonder as you see the stars, feel the grass, taste a treat, smell a rose, hear songbirds, sense harmony. Your connection to a secure glorious future.

The parables proclaim God’s redeeming compassion for everyone that will bring us home again and again no matter what. No matter how you are lost this morning have hope that flows from knowing God is with you and weeping over your every tear. Have hope empowered by God promise to bring you home to God’s love. Have hope inspired by the rejoicing of the angels, all of heaven and God when Jesus brings you home. Amen