



"Remembering the Lost"

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
8:15 and 11:00, Sunday, September 11, 2016
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 51:1-10;
1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I had just dropped Krista off to the baby sitter. The radio station was set to the one that my wife normally listens to and the announcer broke in to say that a small plane had rammed into one of the twin towers. I decided that instead of going to church where I didn't have a TV that I would go back home to see what all this was about. Before I got there, they were commenting how it looks like a hole that's much larger than just a small plane. When I got home and turned on the TV I saw the image that is forever etched into my mind and probably your mind as well. About two minutes of being at home I was sitting on my little hassock and I watched the other plane go into the other building.

I immediately called the office to find out who we have down in Manhattan and started making phone calls. Unfortunately, many of those no longer able to get through. I was able to get through to my wife who worked in Queens, and I asked her to consider coming home immediately because after an attack like that I was fearful that they would close the bridges, which they did indeed do for a number of hours. I went to the church and we made up a quick poster so we could do a prayer service. The next day I went down into town and handed out these posters and put up these posters for a memorial service. As I was walking back to the church, I saw my wife's car pull up to the church, she had made it over the bridge before they were closed.

We promised that we would never forget. I am not so sure about that. As time goes by we forget about the conditions that brought this on, we forget about the situation that is behind it, the history, the politics, everything that is wrapped up in it. Over time maybe it's, maybe it's easy to forget.

When asked in a survey by the Lutheran Church's Department for Research and Evaluation they asked the question; If your pastor were to give you the names of three persons or families in their neighborhood who were not church members, offered to train you in visitation and asked you or your group to visit these families, and to share the meaning of the gospel in your lives, how would you respond? A little more than 20% said they would visit and witness to their faith with reservation. Another 33% said they were not sure if they would do it or not, and 38% said they would refuse to share their faith.

Have we forgotten?

In my second call I was going through some old papers in the library and I found the original interview sheets from the mission board from the United Lutheran Church, a two-page questionnaire. The members of that congregation when they were forming, and I guess all Lutheran congregations at that time, when they were forming, would send out to the small nucleus of members of those who wanted to form a congregation and they would go door to door to ask questions of neighbors and to invite people into this new community of faith. I wonder if in those just short years from the 1920's to today have we lost something of ourselves? Have we forgotten, have we forgotten our identity?

How I don't know about you, but when I lose something the best way for me to find it is for me to retrace my steps, to think about where I was when I was holding whatever I had lost. Maybe that's what we need to do as Lutheran Christians. Maybe we need to retrace our Lutheran identity, for that identity is a strong one indeed. A love of worship, a freedom of the Christian, the sharing of God's amazing grace. Only faith, only scripture, only Christ, the studying of the scriptures, caring for others. Even today, Lutherans are some of the best of doing that through our social services.

Why is this important for us to reconnect with our identity? Because brothers and sisters, more than any time I think you and I need to understand deeply that lost things matter to God.

Luke's gospel is full of these wonderful stories about things that are lost and the joy in heaven of when they are found. Lost sheep. Lost coins. Lost people. Lost things matter to God. And there are too many people in our world today dealing with profound loneliness or they're wrapped with incredible guilt over sins, real or imagined. There are homeless and poor, sick and dying, frightened, addicted, fearful. Lost ones need a kind word. Lost ones who need a word of hope. Lost ones in need of a Savior. And lost ones who need **you** to be the hands and the feet of Jesus Christ.

If we share that precious gift that has been given to us, people will listen, and it's nothing less than sharing our lives, our hopes, our dreams, an invitation to faith. Because there is joy in heaven when lost people are found.

There's a passion and a joy in doing this. There's a witness and inclusion in God's kingdom that the Pharisees and the Scribes simply did not understand. You see the self-righteous, those who cannot see their own sin, they get mad over such things because they're too busy worrying about who has been left out and excluded. They're too busy worrying about what's right and what's wrong. They don't seem to get that when something or someone comes home, joy is the result. And it's that wholeness and inclusion that produces joy for anyone whose heart is willing to embrace it. Isn't that the same with our lives? The people we love are away or they're missing, or lost? We don't feel whole. We're not happy. But we become happy, for example, we get gathered together at family reunions, well for the most part, right? I mean maybe there's one or two that we wish didn't show up. But, we're overjoyed when we're greeted by and greeting loved ones who have been away from us.

And so God too invites us to share in his joy when people discover the joy of faith and community. After all, it is God is the one who is offering the invitation to community and

love. That's the real power of this parable from Jesus. God is calling us to join in his saving word to remember the lost to our invitation and celebration. So smile at that child that's making a little noise. Clap your hands for joy at the music that you hear that moves your soul. Call your neighbors and friends to rejoice in the work of God in our midst. Never forget. Never forget your call to ministry, your call to action, your call to love and service in the name of Christ. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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