

Preached by Rev. JF Hudson at Pilgrim Church: 9/16/07  
Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

“To Begin at the Beginning: Found By God”

So Jesus told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.”

I’m pretty well convinced that God makes people in one of two ways: the lost and the found. The found? They are those rare souls that claim an innate sense of direction, an internal compass that guides them as they travel. My best friend growing up, Craig, could visit a place just once, then return there, say five years later, and find it just from memory, without any written directions. He could somehow recall landmarks along the way and then inevitably we’d always arrive at that place. Safe. Sound. Found. Is that you?

But then there’s the rest of us...the perpetually lost, the directionally challenged, like me. I get lost constantly, especially when I move to a new place. In the past month I’ve gotten lost at least once a day. Trying to get to Needham my first week I ended up in Wellesley; getting detoured from Speen Street two weeks ago I got so turned around I ended up in Southborough. Now when I get lost I always try strategies I think will somehow get me back on track. First I turn the radio off as if silence will now make it clearer how to get there. I drive faster as if speed has something to do with direction. Or I look for landmarks to ground me—lately I’ve been using the unfinished towers of condominiums over the Natick Mall as my point of direction: if I can still see that, I’m not yet lost!

And yet—in spite of Mapquest, and sophisticated in-car Global Positioning Systems and map books—we all get lost sometimes. It is that most human of dilemmas: being lost and not just physical “lostness” if you will, but also spiritual “lostness” sometimes too. Have you ever lost your way from God, from life?

Lost: my oldest colleague in ministry, Barb, was on sabbatical in 2001 when while standing on an outcrop of rocks near an ocean side retreat center in Gloucester, she somehow tripped and fell fifteen feet to the rocky ocean floor below, suffering a severe head injury. In a coma for four days, she emerged from that near-death experience physically intact but mentally, emotionally, spiritually--she was lost. Celebrating her first post-injury Christmas she realized she had forgotten all her favorite Christmas hymns. She’d go into a room to do something and just forget why. Driving in her car one day, she rear ended another car merely because she tried to answer a question from her passenger and drive at the same time, something most of us easily do but for Barb—that was now impossible. She described those foggy months after the fall as her “lost” time—as if all the landmarks, and all the memories, and the all familiar touchstones on which she had built her life: they were gone, lost. It shook her spirit. It rocked her world.

We all get spiritually lost at times. A spouse dies or we get a divorce or a parent passes away and the world is unfamiliar, foreign, strange, scary. We depend upon a job

for our identity and then we lose it or we quit or retire and we are no longer sure just who we are or what we are supposed to do. Our last kid leaves the house for college and that empty nest feels really empty: who am I if not a Mom, a Dad? We get lost in an addiction: something we thought we could control but then we drink more or eat more or drug more and we spiral down into a dangerous world of dependency. Lost. Ever felt that way—maybe even today?

Lost...last week I spoke about how we are formed by our God in this church community, to be dependent upon each other and God for life. Today—let's consider what it means to be found, to be found by God, our God, at Pilgrim church. Found—and loved—and known—and brought back to this spiritual home by a God who knows that we all get lost sometimes.

Lost and found—the two parables we heard from Jesus in the Gospels. The Pharisees are grumbling because Christ has the chutzpah to share a dinner table with sinners—tax collectors and prostitutes—folks the religious establishment labeled as totally lost to and from God and the faith community. So Jesus tells two stories: one of a shepherd who loves just one lost sheep so much that he goes out, leaving the other 99, all to find that precious animal. And—another tale of a woman who sweeps her house, turns it upside down, all to find just one lost coin, squirreled away in a corner, once lost but now found!

Lost: so here's today's question—do we want, are we willing to find and be found by our searching God? By a Good Shepherd who seeks us, an attentive housekeeper who desires nothing more than to find and love us? Those questions are key because I think sometimes we humans do lose God, lose faith, lose meaning but we aren't always so ready or willing or able to admit that we need to be found by our God. Then we are like—and I say this as a man—the men who get lost in the car but then refuse to stop and ask for directions. Wives—any husbands like that here today? You know who you are!

So: the first step of having a faith that matters, that is real, is a personal recognition that we need our navigator God; that we need a home base place like church to be found by others on the journey, found by God and that finally without God: we are lost my friends, lost. Can you, can I have the courage to declare, “God I am lost! God: I need you to direct me and find me!”?

That can be tough in a place like Sherborn, in this area, in lives where many of us are so high-flying economically, highly educated, high-powered in our jobs, high functioning in our lifestyles. I've got a big house. I'm not lost. I have all these folks who report to me at work—I'm not lost! I went to an Ivy League school—I'm certainly not lost. I am in complete control of my life—and I never get lost and yet....

If we are to be found by our seeking God I truly believe that first we have to confess that yes, we get lost spiritually, emotionally, morally--lost. We do lose our ways and at these times we need a director God to show us the way back home and bring us back on to the road of faith.

The miracle and gift is that we barely have to turn back towards God in order to be found. It all begins with one prayer: “God: I need you.” I have many friends who swear by the spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12 steps. In some churches the joke is that many weeks there is more real faith happening in that room full of addicts downstairs on Thursday night, than in that room full of the righteous upstairs on Sunday

morning. For a person in recovery, steps one and two are about embracing a “found life”, and not being lost anymore: “Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives were unmanageable. Step 2: Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

For Christians: perhaps these can be our first two steps. One: We admit that we get lost sometimes in this life, despite our best efforts. Two: We believe that Jesus Christ, in God, can find us and bring us back onto the road of true life.

Lost and found. I close with verses from the poem “Hound of Heaven”, by Francis Thompson. “I fled from God, down the nights and down the days; I fled from God, down the arches of the years; I fled from God, down the labyrinth of my own mind. In the midst of tears, I hid...hid from God. Up visted slopes I sped, shot precipitated over chasmed fears....But those strong feet of God came after with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace; with constant speed and divine instantcy. And a voice, more persistent than the feet, spoke and said: ‘You are my precious one. I will not let you go.’”

Lost to life—found by God. Listen: the shepherd calls, “Come home—you don’t have to be lost anymore.” Let all the people say, “Amen!”