

It Once Was Lost
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I am going to kick off the sermon with a parable that is not represented in the readings we've just heard.

A Woman With Ten Drachmas Luke 15:8-10

What woman having ten drachmas, if she loses one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek carefully until she finds it? When she finds it she calls together all her friends and neighbors, saying to them "rejoice with me for I have found the coin that I had lost."

You can tell a lot about a person by how they act when they lose something that matters to them. There are those people who when something is lost will blame any one and everyone they can think of- Katie is always accusing me of moving her stuff. She leaves piles laying around-I can't stand piles so sometimes I actually do move her stuff, but whenever she loses anything, she thinks it is because I have moved it. When she finds it, whatever it was, there is no celebration about it because she usually has to admit that it wasn't me who moved it in the first place. This sounds like one of those political commercials on TV last week before the elections-

"Katie Morrison, if it's lost she'll blame you! Do you really want another four years of being blamed for something you didn't do?"

Paid for by The Concerned Citizens of Lost and Found Objects, these opinions do not necessarily represent fairness or democracy of any sort."

Here is another response to losing something...

I have these little clip on sunglasses that I loose... weekly, sometimes two or three times a week... and it is always a big deal; One- because they are kind of expensive little dealies, I have already had to replace them a number of times, and Two- because I need them to see, I have light eyes and they can't handle sun very well-so it is always 'big drama' when I loose them. Now, I can't blame anyone else for loosing them- I might if I could, but it happens so often I'm clear that I am the only one that is responsible for their loss. I am simply incapable of putting things in the same place twice... and sometimes that's a problem.

So, when I loose them...I panic...I stop everything I am doing and I run around like a maniac, until I have turned the whole house over and found the little suckers. If I can't find them, I stew about it, and stew about it, until the time when I can look some more; I stew about it until I actually find them. Then I rejoice as if it is my birthday and I vow to never loose them again!

There ya have it, two ways of dealing with loss; blame somebody else and look for it anyway, or blame yourself, and make yourself crazy until you find it.

This parable of the woman and the coin, has been on my mind since a classmate of my used it as the basis for his assignment in Parable class two weeks ago. The assignments consist of choosing a parable, reciting it and them coming up with a set of circumstances that mirror the parable as a way of getting to the heart of it's meaning. This is called parableing.

So my classmate recited the parable:

“What woman having ten drachmas, if she loses one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek carefully until she finds it? When she finds it she calls together all her friends and neighbors, saying to them “rejoice with me for I have found the coin that I had lost.”

And then he told this story. He told it like it was a children’s moment, like he was speaking to a group of kids up at the front of church, so I suppose you could all pretend you are children if you want but knowing you all, that will just give you more excuses to misbehave in church and it will take us longer to get through the story- so resist the temptation. His story was about a single mother who had two boys. The oldest boy was six his name was Matt and the youngest by was four his name was Jack. They didn’t have a lot of money-Mom was working several jobs to make ends meet but Matt had been given a special gift for his birthday this year. The gift was a box of twelve lifelike, plastic dinosaurs. Matt loved his dinosaurs and played with them everyday- he was always careful to count them all up and make sure all the dinosaurs were there, before closing the lid on the box and putting them on the highest shelf in his room so that his kid brother Jack couldn’t get a hold of them.

Well one day, Matt was at school and Jack was home sick with a cold... you can see where this is going...Jack pulled the dinosaurs off the shelf and got to playing with them. When he heard his brother come home from school he panicked, threw dinosaurs back in the box and did his best to get them back up on that high shelf just as his brother had left them. But what do you suppose happened? He lost one of the dinosaurs.

Now, imagine you're the older brother- you come into the room to play with your prize dinosaurs only to find one missing... how do you react?

The way my classmate told the story was that; Matt knew his younger brother had played with the dinosaurs and had lost one, but instead of blaming him or making himself crazy trying to find it- he said to his brother, "You know Jack there are still eleven dinosaurs left, let's play with those until dinner is ready."

Ah hah- a third way to deal with loss. Not by blaming or by panicking but by looking at what we do have instead of focusing on what we don't have. This third option makes a very subtle, but important point...how the older brother treats the younger brother, becomes more important in the story than whether or not the thing that's lost gets found.

So, a few weeks back Paul and Al were working late on the bookkeeping and I noticed something was troubling them-"What's up boys?" I shouted from my office, and the two of them came to the edge of the door. "Well, we have some bad news" they said, " the offering from the last week in August, appears to be missing." Now just to complicate matters this was one week prior to launching the Stewardship Campaign. Uhhmf, how to respond? Was it lost, was it stolen? We don't really know. My sermon title is, "It Once Was Lost" and I am not about to tell you that it now is found, the sermon title might just as well read, "It Once Was Lost... and it still is.

But as I listened to my classmate relate this parable to the story of the two boys, I realized that while it is shocking and somewhat disheartening to lose an offering and ultimately, I do hope we will figure out what happened-what matters more- is not the thing that is lost but how the people to whom the loss matters- treat each other.

Both the Ruth and the Mark text this morning present stories that transform scarcity into abundance. They are about making a way out of no way. These two stories are about living out a commitment of concern for another's welfare. Boaz and Ruth give birth to the child who will be called Naomi's, he will become the Grandfather of the great King David and the Widow in Mark's Story gives God every penny she has- these are sacrificial acts that bless those who make them; but they are more than that. These gifts, these acts of selflessness, the child and the money, do something more than fulfill an immediate need, what else do they do? The gifts point towards the health and well being of the future. Ruth and Naomi's story points to the future of Israel-King David. The Widow's story points to the future of Jesus ministry, to the ministry of the Disciples, to the future of God's Kingdom.

What I am getting at here is that how we respond to adversity, whether here in the church or in our everyday lives, has both a short term and long-term effect. Watching the responses to the election on Wednesday, morning I learned a lot about the people who are stepping into office. I learned a lot about the people who are stepping down. How people react to losing something that matters to them, tells you a lot about a person.

What can people tell about us, are relationships more important to us than things? Are people more important than power? Is abundance more important than scarcity? How we react when we loose, tells the world a lot about who we are.

I went to a lecture last week by a wonderful teacher, Parker Palmer I'll talk some more about that in another sermon. He closed his lecture with this statement, "I don't believe in facts, I believe in truth." On Tuesday, the country lost some ground and it gained some ground, last August we lost some money, we don't know where it is or what happened to it, Matt may or may not ever have twelve dinosaurs again-those are the facts. But the truth is that these facts shouldn't change who we are together, and how we behave with each other. How we behave with each other has both short term and long-term results. Ultimately, how we are in relationship with each other is what matters most to God. Lost or found we belong to each other, "I don't believe in facts, I believe in truth."

Amen