

Sunday, September 18 2022 Pentecost 15 ***“Hope Happens Here: Lost and Found”***

Psalm 14, Luke 15:1-10

Many of us could probably tell stories about being lost. Whether we are driving in a different neighbourhood, or city or even country, we might become lost because of the circumstances we find ourselves in. It is easy to get turned around and lose sight of where one is going if the road is under construction with detours moving us from one area to another. Yet today with GPS and the internet available on our phones we can connect with google maps to help us find our way.

But what happens if your phone is low on battery? It may be getting dark as you drive and the further you go in one direction leads you to detours or unknown places. This is often when people become afraid or panic. Yet there is something that may help- asking for help in order to find your path again.

This past week many people have started classes in new buildings or work in new places. The stress levels were high but as the days go by there comes a sense of what is familiar in hallways, people you meet and even where to go. This is often when people say they have found their way and are all right. But might happen if this way is not found? What occurs then?

Our reading from Luke 15 is part of the trilogy of parables focusing on the lost—sheep, coin and prodigal son and his family. In these parables what is lost is often overshadowed by the finder, or in the case of the prodigal son, how the lost becomes found. But as we focus on two of these stories, we are reminded about the context in which they are shared. Tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees and scribes were all gathering around Jesus to hear what he had to say. They knew him to be a storyteller and teacher. He spoke in parables a way of teaching one main point which for the listener sometimes was like putting a mirror over themselves and asking, is Jesus referring to or about me? Or even am I the one in the story and just what character am I? The parables are told through common daily life occurrences in Palestine of the First Century. Jesus then speaks asking the question and immediately gets their attention. “Which one of you, having 100 sheep and losing one of them does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”

Jesus invites the listener into the story- whether those listening were shepherds was not necessary but the story is not about being a shepherd—it is about caring for the one which is lost. But for a moment if you were that shepherd would you go back to the sheepfold and count the 99 and sit at the gate and sleep? Would you say to yourself that's good enough 99 are here and I'm tired? The landowner/ farmer won't know; I'll look for the lost one tomorrow? Would you do this?

Sheep of any age are followers, they need help to find water and green grass. If they wander they need guidance to get back with the rest. They cannot run fast if seen by predators. The risk of leaving the one sheep out in the field overnight would be high that it would die. And this is Jesus' point. The shepherd would target his time to look for the lost one until it is safe back at the farm and sheepfold. He is hopeful that the lost sheep will be found alive and well. He is filled with hope that the risk he took in leaving 99 by themselves is worth it in finding the one which had wandered away. Once the shepherd finds the sheep he calls to other shepherds or hired hands to celebrate with him. This may seem such a minor problem for the shepherd—99 are good enough in the sheepfold but what if one got lost each day? The shepherd cared enough for that lost sheep to search for it and bring it home and to celebrate.

The second story is about a woman with 10 silver coins. In the story, Jesus says, if she loses one of them wouldn't she light a lamp and sweep the house and search for it? Often we read this thinking that she already lost the coin and is desperately searching for 1/10 of her wealth. But Jesus said, if she lost the coin wouldn't it be right that she would light the lamp spending money for the fuel in the hope of finding the coin. Yet lighting the light pays off, as she finds the coin and celebrates with her neighbours. How do they know what happens? They saw the light on and she tells them to come and celebrate.

Both the shepherd and the woman have hope—to find what was lost and then upon finding it, they celebrate. Jesus then pulls the listener out of the daily life story and says, "I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." He moves them to the heavenly realm where God's angels are the one celebrating when one person who was lost is found. There is joy in heaven when this occurs.

IT is now almost autumn when we come together to worship as the body of Christ in this place and reconnect or acquaint ourselves with each other. There have been many challenges in these last 2 years yet it is time to be back to church; to fellowship with each other and to profess or renew our faith as people who have hope in God for all of our tomorrows. St Augustine states: "There is no love without hope; no hope without love and neither love nor hope without faith." And this is who we are!

We are people of faith who believe that Christ Jesus taught us to live and to believe in God. We trust God to guide our lives and as a church family, we believe that hope is found when lives are changed. And the angels are filled with joy like we are when we welcome people into God's family by the waters of baptism, and profession of faith. When people put on Christ and share their faith story with others—there is much to be celebrated!

When people who have wandered away from others and are looked for, cared for and welcomed or welcomed back, there is love. Where there is love, hope is found. It is also found when the church family makes an effort to clear away the cobwebs of the past, sweep up the dust and toss it away in forgiveness as we search for people who are in need and seeking a new hope. The people of this church are willing to walk alongside those who are hurting, alone, or not well or in need in some way because we believe in God who changes and transforms lives. No matter where one is, you are not alone, God is with you and you are loved.

Maybe there are people watching online or maybe here in person and you are in need of this hope in Christ Jesus. OR maybe it is time to renew one's faith and place your life in God because you are unsure of where life is headed. Maybe you are not clear of the path that is intended for you by God. Yet you believe that God's love endures and through him you have hope. Dostoevsky states: "To live without hope is to cease to live." Are you living without hope or are you searching for hope in order to have an abundant life in Christ? Hope happens here.

In the parables Jesus states that the shepherd and the woman celebrates with others when the lost sheep and coin are found. He then states that there is much joy experienced by the angels when one sinner repents. When we think of angels, often we hear them speaking to people with the words, "Fear not, don't be afraid". They don't sound to happy or joyful as they

speak to people. Yet Jesus says that there is a celebration in heaven when a sinner/ a person who like you and I, turns to God after hearing that there is hope in the name of God. There is hope and eternal life made possible by Jesus Christ. When a person believes, professes their faith and begins their journey to grow in relationship with Jesus and live as he taught—there is joy in heaven! The angels sing and shout; they might even dance around too! There is joy in heaven. I like this idea of a party in heaven with the angels singing and shouting! == Wouldn't it be great to keep this party going? This is what we are called to do as a church—to be the hands and feet of Christ and tell His story. Enable people to have hope because without it, life is meaningless. Without hope life will mean less and less.

But let us rejoice and give thanks because hope happens here! By God's grace, by the efforts of people who have professed their faith in Christ and are committed to serving this church. Together we are using the gifts given by the Spirit in order that the angels will be filled with joy. Let us keep the angels singing as we share the message of Christ Jesus as Hope Happens Here!

LET US PRAY>

God of grace and hope we praise you that our hope is in you. For without hope life has no purpose or meaning. Struggles would only overpower if we had no hope. Help us O God to be filled with hope as we prayerfully share together the good news of Christ Jesus. Amen.