

Here and now.

O God, because without you we are not able to please you mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Collect for Proper 19, The Book of Common Prayer, page 233

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 19C)
Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51:1-11, 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-10
September 11, 2016

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 15:1-10

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he 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. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Here is a poem that was published by the poet David Wagoner in a collection he described as based on the "lore, legends, and myths of Northwest coast and plateau Indians." It is called "Lost."

*Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.*

*No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.*

We gather at the beginning of a new program year here at St. Mark's-in-the-Valley, a program year that includes an enhanced program of Christian formation for children and youth, a new focus on inviting, welcoming, and connecting with and engaging with and serving our neighbors in the world around us, a new website and parish app. Many of our children and youth are at the beginning of a still somewhat new school year; summer isn't far behind us.

This is also the fifteenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York City, now long enough ago that some of our youth weren't born, have lived all of their lives since and in the shadow of that day of fear and destruction. We are entangled, as a nation, in an acrimonious election season that is distressing in itself, but is a symptom of much larger and more troubling polarization and dysfunction in our society and culture and in the global culture that has become only more violent and ruinous over the past decade and a half, since September 11, 2001. That event, we see, was not the height of anything, just the beginning of many new chapters in

human brokenness and failure.

And, of course, we bring our own personal losses and challenges through the doors: our own illnesses and deaths, all of the ways in which we have our own anxieties, uncertainties – and sometimes certainty about what is not working in our own lives.

How can we begin a new anything? How do we make our way to all we continue to hope for, all we want to do and be and change in the midst of what seems so bleak? How do we begin anything we can see as new, as a turning point, as a fresh direction?

*Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let
it find you.*

Jesus tells these famous parables – of the lost sheep and the lost coin. He tells them to people distressed by the company he keeps – and he is telling them to the company he is keeping. So there is this gathering around him, this mixed bag of upstanding, respectable religious types, as well as the low life, truly despicable bottom-feeders in whom Jesus took a particular delight and with whom, ultimately, he would die.

And his response to the

predicament is similar to what we heard from the poet: let yourself be found.

No matter what is going on around us, God knows where we are. God, the Sacred, the Spirit, the Holy will find us.

Think of it: the lost sheep and the lost coin do nothing to aid in the effort to be found. They *can* do nothing.

What is delightful about the parable is the way in which Jesus questions his listeners – which one of you would not leave 99 sheep to go look for one lost sheep? He asks as if it is the most obvious thing in the world when, of course, *no one* would do that.

And then the woman searches and searches for her one lost coin and then, upon finding it, immediately *spends* it – and possibly more – on celebrating that she found it – so it was gone again!

These parables do not actually make sense. Not to us.

They only make sense to God whose undying compassion for the actual world in which we live, for the actual people we are, means we are never lost. No one is ever lost. The world is not lost. God knows where we are. We simply must let ourselves be found – in the midst of our lives, our living, our dying, our real surroundings, in what we are doing day by day.

And in being found by God, God's ways win and God is

continually making all things new – sometimes in ways we see and sometimes in ways beyond human knowing....

So, for us, how can we do anything but pour ourselves into what is new, what is possible, what is the focus of our passion for ourselves and for the people who are our neighbors – the ones we might want to take home to meet the family as well as the ones who worry us, who are truly scary or *seem to be* lost causes.

So we are people who come together fully conscious of the reality of the real world – because it is our world – and knowing everything we do we sing at the tops of our voices: “All is ready, here and now: All are welcome here.”

We aren't looking to an idealized world sometime in an undefined future.

We are saying: here and now. All is ready.

Not just for us, but for everyone.

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, lost so much of the time there, but God enduring with them and bringing them through the whole journey to the promised land. Or Paul in his letter to Timothy, despicable though he was, but delighting in God's utmost patience and mercy. Or the psalmist in the dark night, in exile, awaiting the sound of God's joy and

gladness.

God offers us a new heaven and new earth – here and now.

I invite us to imagine the possibilities of a more profound commitment within this faith community in which our horizon is one formed and given to us, to the world, by the Risen Christ, the Holy One, not by a political party or focus group and not capable of falling to dust and ashes. As a community of faith, our commitment is the world that God so loves, so we are not barricading ourselves in a narrow, airless room, as a self-satisfied holy club, but finding ourselves free to be alive, vital, confident and loving – transformed and transformative people in a world that is not lost to God. God who knows that rejoicing is certain.

All is ready.

Here and now.



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