

17 Pentecost

September 11, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28 Israel has turned away from God; the Lord says the earth will be filled with sadness.

1 Tim 1:12-17

God would bring desolation to Israel, "but I will not make a full end."

Luke 15:1-10

The parable of the Lost Sheep, the parable of the Lost Coin

Theme: Lost sheep are people outside the family of God, but this also describes us anytime we give something in our life the importance God should have.

Jesus was talking to religious leaders who believed that if someone sinned, they should turn their life around, ask God for mercy, and God would grant it. Until they 'repent', they should be treated as outcasts, and NOT invited to be dinner guests. These parables we just heard say that God doesn't wait for people to turn their life around; God goes after them, to bring them home, into His family. He doesn't just FIND them, he brings them HOME. This turns around the notion that we need to express our remorse to God when we know we have fallen off the path of His grace, in order for God to accept us 'back'. Instead, God doesn't wait to see signs of remorse, but comes after us wherever we are. Our remorse should be the response we give to God's loving determination to come after us, find us, and bring us back home to Him.

Our very goofy standard poodle is nine months old now. We love watching him watch the world. When Ruth or I walk him and birds appear overhead, he stops walking, because he is too busy looking at these creatures flying through the sky. Last week, as I was walking him around the block, he started tugging on the leash. I corrected him: No Moses, heel. He ignored me, and kept pulling. I looked up ahead, and five feet in front of us I saw what he was pulling to explore; a fist sized tarantula spider that was making its way across the road. But now there is one situation that goes way beyond his being distracted. SQUIRRELS... It's not about watching them. He seems to be very ready to dive through the living room window to get to this one squirrel who very intentionally climbs the tree just outside the window and stares at Moses. His 20 weeks of obedience training mean nothing when this arrogant squirrel shows up.

Can you relate to the idea of getting distracted in your spiritual life?

Just like your work, or a hobby, or stresses, or sin can distract you from your human relationships, have they kept you from paying attention to your spiritual relationships? Have there been some spiders and squirrels taunting you away from your spiritual life?

The Gospel parables explain two dimensions we should be paying attention to:

One dimension is shown by the example of the lost sheep. The sheep decided to wander away; like Moses (the dog) with the tarantula or the squirrel, or birds, or a stick, or thousands of other ways he forgets the rules for being our dog. Like the lost sheep, there are times when all of us get too busy to think about God; as Jeremiah was writing about in our OT lesson today. Judah forgot its first commandment obligation to center its life on God; instead the people organized their life around objects which they thought they could control. Jeremiah was proclaiming that since the covenant with God was not being kept, God's destructive judgment would be irrevocable. But there was an escape clause: "The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end." God is great about making wake up calls for us. Look for the wake-up calls God is sending YOU during your day; messages that you are off course... let God bring you home.

The second dimension is shown by the example of the lost coin. There was no intention by the coin to get itself lost. That was the result of outside circumstances that covered it up, or slipped it under a cushion. In 1 Timothy, Paul was "lost" by not understanding, and not believing, who Jesus was. But then he understood, and he believed that Jesus is God the Son. If we have been slowly drawn off the course of placing God first in our life, it can take a while before we realize that we don't pray as much; we don't read Holy Scripture very often; we don't volunteer for a serving ministry anymore; we don't stay regularly connected to our faith family. But then God wakes us up, finds us wherever we are in our head, and invites us home with Him...

There are lots of ways for us to feel lost; to get separated from the family of God. A major objective of Sunday Worship is for us to BE the family of God for 75 minutes, so we can feel its power, and we can encourage ourselves to remember and feel our membership in God's family all week long. We can encourage members not here, to come and re-connect. We can invite friends to come and experience what it feels like to be the family of God.

Are there days that despite your belief in God; you are feeling 'disconnected' from the family of God? Take an accounting of your priorities.

What are the most important things going on in your life?

If something has moved into first place – and it does not include God;

Ask God to find you; and to bring you home.

Share how you feel with a spiritual friend, and ask them to pray for you.

Then you can know that **all of heaven** will be celebrating over your return.

There will be a heavenly Family of God Fall Picnic over you!

Amen