



Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
Connecting faith with everyday life

“The Joy of Being Found”

Rev. Jennie Sankey

Luke 15:1-10

September 15, 2019

We all have stories of when we’ve lost something-perhaps it wasn’t a sheep.

For me, my top two “One time I lost...” stories include the time I dropped my wedding ring through the cracks of a wharf on the Mobile Bay, and when my dog, Bob, escaped his dog-sitter on Christmas Day as I was heading out of town. The only reason I tell these stories though, is because they had a good ending. A friendly man with an underwater metal detector found my ring two days later, and some strangers who saw my dog in their neighborhood called me so that I was able to reunite with Bob before New Year’s Eve. If these stories had ended differently, I probably wouldn’t tell them as often, because they would be painful and embarrassing. “Yeah, a couple years ago my dog ran away from me on Christmas Day, and I never saw him again...” or “I dropped my ring into the Mobile Bay, and now I don’t have one anymore” doesn’t have as nice of a ring to it.

Similarly, our two parables today, are told by Jesus because of their endings. What was lost is found. These really aren’t stories about losing things, they are stories about a commitment to finding things, and the joy that comes with being found.

Although titled “the lost sheep” and “the lost coin,” these stories wouldn’t be very interesting if the sheep and the coin stayed lost. It would be a bummer; the shepherd on a long search, only to return to the other 99 without the lost sheep. He goes home that night, feeling badly, and goes to bed. The woman searches her whole house from top to bottom, and just can’t find that darn coin. She goes to bed, frustrated with herself for being so careless. And it probably wouldn’t be a very good story if it was from the point of view of the coin or the sheep. Because coins don’t experience emotions. And sheep aren’t very smart-it probably didn’t really know it was lost, but was just grazing around and wandered off. It is the *finder* who has agency in this story. They own something of value: sheep, silver coins. And they realize they are missing one. How do they come to this conclusion? Counting.

You can’t just look at a flock of 100 sheep and know that one is missing. And you don’t glance at a pile of coins, and think “hmmm, that looks like nine instead of ten.” To know

they were missing something, the shepherd had to be counting his flock, the woman counting her stash of coins. These aren't stories of misplacing your car keys or sunglasses. These are stories of losing something of real value to a person, something they are deeply committed to.

When we value something, we pay it attention. My wedding ring represents a commitment Steve and I made to one another in 2012. When I lost my wedding ring, I didn't have to count my bands 1...2... to realize I lost one, because I immediately saw it fall from my hand to the water and panicked. When Bob escaped, I couldn't bring myself to continue driving out of town for a vacation, because I'm committed to that dumb little creature, who depends on me for his food, shelter, safety, and happiness. My commitment to the search made the joy of finding that ring in the sand and dog in the street all the more sweet.

Last week, Rev. Andrade introduced us to the book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* by David Brooks. We're using this book as a companion to our preaching during stewardship season here at Pleasant Hill, as we each discern what we want to commit to this church in the coming year.

Brooks writes that most people encounter two mountains during their lives. We begin climbing our first mountain as we begin adulthood. It's about the things we do at work, at home, seeking happiness in material wealth and success in the eyes of others.

And after some time, we recognize that though we're at the top, we aren't happy after all. At this point we find ourselves in existential crisis. Lost. Whether lost in faith, relationship, or purpose, we realize we lack deep connection. So begins our all-in climb to the second mountain, a place of meaning, community, and authenticity, a place we can't get to alone. At the top of the second mountain we find more than happiness: there is joy.¹

"At Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church we are together, as one body, climbing that second mountain. We encourage vulnerability so we can embrace authenticity. We practice radical hospitality so we may forge relationships based on sacrifice. We put all that we have in following Christ. We climb not to please a demanding God, but because of the joy God offers to us as we do the work of climbing. Joy comes from commitment."²

Brooks goes on to define commitment as "making a promise to something without expecting a reward. A commitment is falling in love with something and then building a

¹ David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*. (Random House, 2019), xi-xiv.

² Andrade, Jody. "More Than I Say." Sermon, Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church, Duluth, GA, September 8, 2019.

structure of behavior around it for those moments when love falters.”³ These two stories tell us of two people who have made commitments to what they love—to their flock, to their household, and what happens when that love has faltered. A sheep is lost, a coin is missing. Their commitment to these aspects of their lives, drives the shepherd and the woman to their missions of finding.

Jesus starts his stories with “which one of you, having 100 sheep, or what woman who has 10 silver coins, and losing one of them does not” diligently search for their lost thing. Now the honest answer might be, “well not me.” Because, what about the other 99 sheep? Won’t they be in danger if you look for the one? And how often do we not search for something lost in your home, because will think, “well, it will turn up.” Jesus tells these stories, knowing this about us humans. Which one of us would not search diligently? Plenty of us. Who would search, every single time? God would.

In the last third of Brook’s book he muses, “Throughout this book I’ve been talking about commitments as a series of promises we make to the world. But consider the possibility that a creature of infinite love has made a promise to us. Consider the possibility that we are the ones committed to, the objects of an infinite commitment, and that commitment is to redeem us and bring us home.”⁴

These parables are not about something that is lost, or about us being really good at finding things. They’re about how good God is at finding us. God is like a shepherd who risks everything to go look, and God is like a woman who turns her house over to find. These stories are about a God who has made a commitment, and covenant to God’s people, A God who notices when one of the flock wanders off. We are counted and found by God. That is what makes climbing that second mountain worth it. It isn’t about our own journey of personal success any longer, but a climb of joy-filled commitment, a climb that we make in response to the joy of being found.

What in your life are you in love with enough to build a structure of commitment around?

Some examples I’ve seen around here:

- I have a few friends who won’t miss an Atlanta United game. They love the game of soccer, the team that has been built here in our home city, and the spirit of the fans, who gather at Mercedes Benz stadium in their red and black, to sing chants, cheer, boo and live every moment of those games. So, they buy season tickets. They plan the time in their week to watch and attend. They have the shirts, the scarves, the hats. They have a flag outside their house. When the team loses, they

³ Ibid., xvii.

⁴ Ibid., 262.

don't take down the flag, sell their tickets, and give their gear to Goodwill. They get ready for the next game.

- PHPC member, Olivia Su Reed, loves gymnastics. And she's good. Check out the videos her mom posts, and you'll see Olivia jumping, soaring, dancing, and flipping her way through her routines. And so, Olivia (and her family) have built some of their life around this love. Olivia does school from home through Gwinnett County's online campus, so she can keep up with her full gymnastics practice schedule. She shows up for every practice, every competition. Olivia experiences injury from time to time, but she doesn't let that hold her back. She rests as needed, still showing up at practice, still doing everything her doctor will allow her- until her body is ready to get back in action.
- This church loves Rainbow Village. Instrumental in Rainbow Village's beginnings, Pleasant Hill has provided space in our building, volunteers, money, food, item donations and much time to this non-profit that seeks to break the cycle of homelessness by providing housing, stability, education, and support for its residents. Back in July, Carol DeLoach let me know of a need she'd become aware of at Rainbow Village. They needed lunch boxes for the 60 children who currently live there in order to take snacks to school to tide them through the day and afterschool programs. We put a call out on the PHPC Facebook forum on a Wednesday, and by Sunday after worship, 60 lunch boxes had appeared in the Fellowship Hall, filled with notes of encouragement, and delivered.

When we love something, commit to something, and build a structure of commitment about it, joy overflows. What if, at the base of the things we loved, the values and activities we build our life around, was the good news that we are counted and found by God. Loved and valued by Christ. Sought after and searched for when we wander. How would we live differently if we lived with the joy of being found?

From what I read in scripture, it would mean getting invited to some good parties.

When the shepherd came 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, Jesus says, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

When the woman found the coin, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, "rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I have lost." "Just so, Jesus says, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

In scripture the word that translates from Greek into English as “repent,” *metanoia*, means “to turn” or “to change.” These parables don’t end with our own finding. God’s grace finds us and it’s up to us to respond to the invitation to the party, to turn and go in. I suspect at these parties, the shepherd served mutton for dinner, and the woman bought the wine and snacks to share with her friends with that silver coin. The structure God builds around what God loves is an egalitarian one, and is a structure that is not built to keep anyone out, but to invite them in and share in the feast.

Every church member should have received a letter and pledge card in the mail this week. Jody and I hope you’ve read it carefully. Consider the joy you’ve been given in being found by God, and in committing to Christ’s work through this church. Know that as much love and joy that this church may have given you, there will be times where that love will falter. But because we have built a structure of behavior around this place we love, because our real joy streams from the One who has lovingly committed to us, that love will not fail. Pray about how deeply you can give in 2020.

And then respond. Be part of the party planning. Tell your leadership how big we can dream as we plan next year’s ministry together, calling together our friends and neighbors to rejoice in God’s love with us.