

Luke 15:1-10
Proper 19
Sept 11, 2022

For me believing in God is complicated:
God is a mystery full of contradictions
And my belief is full of contradictions
Yeses and noes and maybes and maybe nots
And I like that

I like that thinking about God makes my mind stretch
That My belief and my unbelief have to talk to each other
often I turn to poetry to hold the bigness and smallness and
yesness and noness and presence and absence and power and
weakness of God together
There is a lot of room in there

So I like my crabby persistent questions
They give my life dimension.
Dimensions and questions I might otherwise ignore.

Getting ready to preach this weekend however was a different
experience
I read over much of the middle gospel of luke;
Parable after parable after parable
The rich fool the lilies of the field the watchful servant the great
dinner the barren fig tree

And ...the lost sheep, the lost coin and the one that comes next
in the Bible, the lost (or prodigal) son which we won't hear this fall
because we already heard it in Lent. So goes the lectionary
system!

And what struck me most about these parables
Was how ...straightforward they were
How simple and human sized
Meant to be understood.

It's as if Jesus is saying

Come closer. Listen. I really really want you to understand
something.

You are precious
You... as you are...are precious
to me to God
And to this world even when it ceases to recognize you

In these stories, an ancient prophet who would know both human
pain and heavenly resurrection
says loud and clear
When you need to feel seen, heard, known...
when you are lost
And can't find yourself
I can find you
No matter what
No matter what you have done or left undone

No matter how unworthy or unreligious or unrighteous or sinful
you feel you are
No matter how selfish and rotten or stanky or racist or pathetic or
angry you feel
You are precious
And I will Find you
And I will Carry you

But how? where? How are we supposed to remember this?
Where are we supposed to look?

And here's a hint : Jesus says
If you want a head start
put down all the extraneous stuff in your hands
Put down any overwhelming obligations and attachments, your
other kingdoms and your other kings
Acknowledge That you are hungry and you need something else.

Have your hands empty so that when I find you I can put bread in
them
Have your arms empty so that when I find you you can put those
arms around my neck so I can carry you home
The kingdom of God is within you Jesus says
Its already there
But to find it, you may have to admit you are hungry and let me
carry you

And that can be hard and even humiliating
for people who are used to being successful and in charge and in
control

That's the reason why the last will be first. Jesus says. It's not a great mystery. It's just common sense
When you know you are broken and vulnerable you can be healed

But how are we supposed to remember this when things are going well?
Or when things are so grim we can't get out of bed?
Where are we supposed to look?
Well, Jesus says: It helps to go to church
And remember these parables
And be with people who see the light in you
Some people call this a found family...like my daughter found this summer at theater camp perhaps...
And see the light in them

Back when there were tolls on the highway and no easy passes...
I kept spare change in my car...in a little well
That was also a coffee holder
Over time the change got grubbier and grubbier and groddier and groddier
The pennies and dimes and quarters all got stuck together with spilt coffee and sour-smelling cream and burst pens..it was really really gross
eventually I'd scoop it all out and run to the garbage to throw it away in disgust
But at the last minute I couldn't
I couldn't throw it away.

It seemed bad luck to throw out something that I knew somewhere somehow in some grand scheme of things was still worth... *something*...even if I had no use for anymore.

In these parables Jesus tells us our worth is infinite.
Even when we have no more use for ourselves
Even when we feel we belong in the the garbage
Even if somewhere sometime someone says those awful words to us
And we are tempted to believe them
They are NOT true
No matter how grubby and coffee stained we feel
No matter how rejected and dejected or selfish or lost and afraid we feel
No matter our weird habit of lugging 5 lbs of coffee-encrusted pennies from house to house

We are precious, worth everything: to save, to find, to see, to know
Not because we can be used
Not because of what we can buy
but because we are mysteriously and wondrously and singularly made
out of an out pouring of love that no one fully understands

And the beautiful thing is this love is not just personal, not just a one way or a two way or a one on one thing
It isn't just some special bond between Jesus and his one lost sheep or the father and his lost son or God and singularly us
Although thankfully it is that too

This is a love that overflows.
That makes more of itself
That travels from heart to heart like a song
That is meant to be caught and shared by a community
And in its overflowing it makes the church
It IS the church.
How can we in the year ahead become more of who we already
are

The church

Where we celebrate the best meal ever
A meal God has made out of the stuff of this world
The meal that restores our true selves
That allows us to be fierce and loving and fearless
Because it reminds us we are also always broken and little and
lost

This is LOST and FOUND Church that is always meant to be a
PARTY
A Picnic
Today
on earth as it will be in heaven

amen

