

Exodus 32:7-14

Luke 15:1-10

1 Timothy 1:12-17

“Create in us a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within us,” AMEN!

So... It does not take a Biblical expert  
to recognize the thread that runs  
through these texts.

In Exodus, the people turn to  
false gods in the midst of starvation and  
fear in the desert wilderness.

And then, in the psalm, we heard  
pleads for mercy from God for the writer,  
who is unclean and evil in the sight of God.

And, in 1 Timothy, Paul wrote about  
receiving mercy in his ignorance,  
persecution and violence against people,  
thinking he was doing the right  
things for God.

The thread of mercy when we mess up,  
when we divert from living lives that  
promote health and welfare for all people,  
when we are judgmental and  
not at all loving, and

we go about living lives short-circuited by fear.

The thread of fear is also apparent, in the lessons.

But, fear is a necessary emotion  
that keeps us alive.

Yes, but dwelling in fear also causes people  
to lose touch with themselves and once  
we lose touch with ourselves then it is  
not long before we lose touch with God.

So part of our call today is not to  
condemn fear or make light of the people  
who turned to false gods because they

thought Moses was dead and they  
no longer had direct contact with God.

They were afraid, rightly so.

Dying of thirst in the desert, I can imagine,  
is not an easy way to go.

Paul was afraid, too.

Afraid the followers of Jesus would  
wreck his religion, undermine everything.

So he sought to lock 'em up

and in some cases... to kill them.

And, the Pharisees and scribes were afraid, too.

Afraid that this Jesus just may be  
God in their midst and they'd been  
getting God wrong all along.

Today, then, we recognize that chronic fear,  
the kind that is debilitating and keeps us  
captive is a form of slavery.

And this slavery to fear disconnects us  
from ourselves and this leads us to  
lose touch with God. (Pause)

And the disconnect, or loss of touch with God,  
is the prime reason Jesus tells his parables  
in the Gospel from Luke.

Chapter 15 binds three parables together.

All told to the Pharisees and scribes  
who were “grumbling” about Jesus.

The Greek word for “grumbling”  
is “Gon-goozo.”

Complaining and grumbling...

Our lectionary provides us with just  
the first two parables in 15, but

they're still directed at the grumblers,  
the "gon-goozo" who complained that  
Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them.

The third parable, not read today but in Chapter 15  
is the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The capstone parable that has fractured  
the hearts of many afraid  
they'd never be welcomed by God.

I would be remiss to not mention  
how much we grumble! :-)

We grumble about our politicians,  
we grumble when one side tries  
to reach over the aisle and work with  
the other side.

No matter what side your on,  
you grumble when one tries to negotiate  
so that policy can move forward.

We grumble when the Spirit pushes,  
pulls, and drags us into areas that

make us uncomfortable.

So the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin  
are as much for our ears as they were  
for the ears of the Pharisees and scribes.

They matter for us because Jesus began  
with asking “Which one of you...?”

“Which one of you would leave 99 sheep to go  
and look for the one that is lost?”

A show of hands, which one of you  
would leave the 99 for the one?

It’s a bit ludicrous to think a shepherd  
would leave 99 unguarded to go look  
for the one that’s lost.

Our trained business minds logically tells us  
to let the one go... that’s a sunk cost,  
focus on what you have.

Besides, we may wonder,  
why was the sheep lost?

Did it wander off?

Maybe it deserves being separated from the flock. (Pause)

That's our quid pro quo mind at work...

In a world of economic stress, political conflict,  
gun and stabbing violence, global war,  
threats of nuclear catastrophes,  
soaring temperatures and energy crises...

what is God revealing about God-self here?

Jesus tells these two parables to address  
why God does what God does,  
not why humans do what humans do.

And we find it is all about joy and about  
God's infinite love for not just you and me,  
but even the ones we count as lost causes!

All we need to do is to think of the joy  
you experienced when  
you finally found something that was lost.

A favorite pen, a special letter,  
your pet that slipped out when  
you weren't watching,

your child in a grocery store...

do you remember the feeling of joy

when what was lost is now found?

That is why God does what God does.

For the joy of finding and the gospel for us it  
that we are invited to celebrate, too.

That's something Jesus is also  
teaching us today.

And it is what we are doing.

Celebrating at God's invitation and  
gathering to remember how God found us  
and brought us in, but not stopping there.

We are invited to gather and remember  
to be joyful when others are found and  
brought in, too. (Pause)

Celibate not grumble...

It really doesn't matter if the sheep  
wandered off by accident,  
or even if it left on purpose because

the next parable is about a lost coin  
and last I checked... coins don't wander off  
or leave by their own will!

So, there goes our excuses that the lost  
deserve to be separated forever,  
they don't... we don't.

So, there's a choice, right?.

We can decide whether to grumble or not.

But, what do you get when you grumble?  
More grumbling... sinking further and further  
from joy.

What do you get when you're joyful?

Yes! It's the karma effect.

Let's be joyful, and celebrate, and  
let God's infinite love flow into us and out of us.

Be merciful, stop condemning and  
be forgiving, instead.

You know, the Christian religion  
has not been very joyful this lately.

Today, more than ever there are Christians  
who hate and judge and condemn.



There is Christian teaching and leaders  
who give an image of God that is toxic and  
goes against everything Jesus revealed  
about God to His followers.

They've put human characteristics on God  
and decided if God condemns,  
punishes people to hell,  
then so can we!

It's why so many people have given up  
on the Christian religion...

It's been focused to be a punishment system  
not a merciful one.

Finally, don't let the parables convince you  
that it's only about finding a lost asset.

Sheep and coins were valuable at the market.

And market prices fluctuate based  
on supply and demand.

Your value, however, does not go up or down.

A person's value does not go up  
when they do something good and go down  
when they do something bad.

Your value, and the value of every person,  
in God's eyes is infinite.

These people, you people... within  
the sound of Jesus' voice, you are  
the hope for the world.

AMEN!