

Sermon ✝ September 11, 2022

Luke 15:1-10

Frank H. Maxwell

I'm a hat guy. And I guess I've always been a hat guy. Even as a young boy, I loved to wear hats.

Years ago, I had a favorite. It was a blue bucket hat. You know the kind that Gilligan (of Gilligan's Island) wore. Mary hated it. She thought it looked "dumpy". And it probably did, but I don't think that she ever quite appreciated the special bond which had developed between that hat and me. It was a comfortable fit . . . it had become a part of me.

I had that particular hat for so long that I'd lost it a couple of times. Each time it happened, I'd get panicky . . . a cold sweat would overtake my body.

The first time I lost it was the most dramatic. We were at Great America near Chicago. I normally don't ride on roller coaster type rides but that day I found myself on one of them. And as the little car in which I was riding swayed precariously back and forth on its narrow track . . . a gust of wind caught my hat and it blew off.

It was one of the worst moments of my life. I looked over my shoulder in time to watch it gently drift to some unknown landing point amidst the maze of steel pipes that made up the foundation of the ride.

The second the ride was over, I leaped out of the car and made my way toward the spot where I had last seen my beloved hat. There were people everywhere. I knew I would be too late. And just as I turned to leave the area, I saw it. That which had been lost was now found and I felt warm inside.

Again this day Jesus speaks in parables . . . special stories that reveal to us a glimpse of the kingdom. And these particular stories speak about recovering that which has been lost.

The Gospel talks in "degrees of lostness" first citing lost sheep. Sheep can get lost through no fault of their own. They just follow the green grass. Even the best shepherds would not find it easy to watch 100 sheep. So, when sheep get lost, we can simply chalk it up to carelessness *or* too many sheep. It happens.

Then he talks about lost coins. Coins don't lose themselves. They are usually lost because of the inattention of others.

And finally, lost people. Some people are lost like coins. People can be left alone, ignored, misled, dumped . . . hurt. And when this happens, someone else is at fault.

I am reminded here of the thousands of homeless people who crowd our streets . . . people who have no where to go . . . and seemingly no hope.

Many people get lost on their own. (The text which immediately follows today's lesson is the Parable of the Prodigal Son). Looking for greener grass somewhere else, they stumble off the pathway. Seeking to run their own show they are not open to guidance or advice.

So, in this instance, such lost people are responsible for their own situation. I am reminded here of the people who are caught up in one of the many addictions that plague our society . . . people who have somewhere taken a wrong turn and can't find the road home. Such persons are lost "in spirit".

The point —The Good News — God will always look for us. And we, in turn, must look for each other.

Knowing how we are (and how we can be) Jesus shares these stories. And their message is beautiful.

No matter how we are lost: through inattention or carelessness; because of something someone else did; or because of our own actions . . . God still seeks us all.

God is persistent and caring. And God is made joyful when we are found and brought (or come) home. And yet, given all of this, we sometimes still don't quite get the message.

Someone once wrote: *"I don't know how we're ever going to be happy in heaven when we're so different from the angels. They rejoice more over one drunk rescued from skid row than over a thousand good church goers who don't feel any need for change."*

As we again read these parables, we are not to simply be passive observers, but we are being called to become active participants in the search.

- ✚ We need to become more like the angels before we can join them in eternity. . . .
- ✚ We need to have more compassion for those who are wayward and wandering . . .
- ✚ We need a willingness to feed the hungry multitudes of this earth . . .
- ✚ We need to open our ears to the cries of the homeless and the outcast . . .
- ✚ We need to open our eyes to see those who are lost in spirit . . . perhaps even friends or members of our own families . . .

This world of ours is filled with "lost hats". But our God, our gracious Lord, values each and every individual being.

All have worth in the eyes of God. We are a *comfortable fit* in God's grand design.

And each and every time that one who was lost returns to God, the angels throw a party . .
. a heavenly party the likes of which we can only begin to imagine.

Blessed be such a God as this!
Amen.