

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

September 15, 2019
Proper 19C / Ordinary 24C / Pentecost +14

The readings this week:

- Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28
- Psalm 14
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- Luke 15:1-10

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Lost and Found

These are familiar images before us now: the shepherd and his sheep, the woman and her coin. In both examples we are reminded of the persistent love of the seeker. As I sit with them again I am reminded of a story from early in my childhood.

We were on a week-end camping trip with a group from our congregation at a Lutheran Church Camp a few hours from home. Some families had brought their tents and campers. Others were renting space in the nearby cabins. Meals were communal, with everyone pitching in. I carry wonderful memories of those annual week-ends for that informal time away was a gift in terms of forming new friendships and cementing old ones.

The story I remember now is one of being lost and found. It was Saturday afternoon and we were playing with others down at the beach. There were lots of children there and it was clearly no easy task for my folks to keep track of the four of us: ranging between the age of two and a half and six. Somewhere in the midst of building sand castles almost three year old Sarah took off. In that instant, no one saw her go.

Within moments my mother knew she was not there. I'll never forget the lifeguard clearing the lake as he and other volunteers walked the edges of the piers looking for her. I may have been only six, but the fear that gripped me then stays with me still.

It felt like hours but was surely only minutes later that Norma crested the hill, with Sarah in her arms. My little sister had wandered back to the campsite, weeping as she walked, and Norma, recognizing her as one of the group, scooped her up and carried her back to her mother. The lost had been found.

Norma became not only a family friend. She was our church secretary (back when we called them that) at my home congregation for forty years. Through at least four pastors, forty program years, countless weddings and funerals, and thousands of Sunday bulletins, she answered the phones, kept track of the calendar and held close the secrets of many. I can remember when I was in confirmation class on Saturday mornings, waiting for my ride home and passing the time watching her as she copied the Sunday bulletin on an old mimeograph

machine. What I especially remember most about that time was that she would listen and answer and go deeper with me about whatever it was we had learned in class that morning. There are a lot of people whose influence factors into one heeding the call to become a pastor. Norma was certainly one of those for me.

I know that I am blessed to serve not so far from home for I have the chance sometimes, still, to connect with those I knew when I was young. I especially knew it this last Saturday morning for Norma's son called me up to ask my thoughts about nursing home options here. Both of their parents' health are failing and her Alzheimer's Disease, in particular, is making this next move necessary.

Sunday afternoon I went to see Norma. I sat down next to her daughter and we visited a while. I don't know for sure if she really remembered me or not, but her smile was as radiant as it ever was. Before I left, I asked if I could pray with her. She placed her hand palm down on the tray table in front of her. I put my hand on top of hers and her daughter put her hand on top of mine. I prayed simply and briefly --- asking for God's protection and strength and peace. When Norma took her hand back, she wiped her eyes for those words had somehow broken through. She may only have pretended to remember me, but still she knows somehow that God remembers her. Slowly but surely the disease that is erasing her memory will not finally erase what matters most. In some ways, she may seem 'lost' to those who have loved her, but she is not lost to God. I expect, or at least I hope, that in that moment she knew God's persistent love embracing her once more. 'Found' once more, I hope her comprehension of God's tender love for her never leaves her.

~ Janet Hunt, [Dancing with the Word](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28](#)

Who is speaking? At what time? What is the difference between “this people” and “Jerusalem?” Is there any connection between “a hot wind” and the wind that blew across the waters at creation or the Holy Spirit? The Lord sounds like a typical parent of adolescents. When will we grow up into adulthood? How could there be no light in the heavens? What might quaking mountains symbolize or represent? What does the emptiness represent or symbolize? How does the earth mourn? How shall we read this verse when in other passages God changes the divine mind? Does process theology help us find a way out of this potential dilemma? [Summit to Shore](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 14](#)

Reflect on a time when you felt foolish. How do you define ‘fool?’ How does this psalm define a fool? If there is no one who does good, what can we say about the unbeliever who helps the little old lady across the street? To what extent has sin corrupted our world? How do you think unbelievers in our neighborhood perceive us? Do they shame us for our belief in God? When we run into unbelievers, do we desire that the salvation of God would reach these people? Is it our desire that many would be added to the church of Christ? [Generations](#)



Our brokenness is the wound through which the full power of God can penetrate our being and transfigure us in God. Loneliness is not something from which we must flee but the place from where we can cry out to God, where God will find us and we can find God. Yes, through our wounds the power of God can penetrate us and become like rivers of living water to irrigate the arid earth within us. Thus we may irrigate the arid earth of others, so that hope and love are reborn.

~ Jean Vanier b.1928, *The Broken Body* (1988, Paulist Press) via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)

What is the first thing that would come to mind if someone was to ask you to share your testimony and why? Why do you think that the writer was surprised that God would use Paul and be merciful? The writer seems to make a distinction between acting in ignorance, and willfully doing something wrong. What do you think is the difference? What power and encouragement does the writer give to Timothy – and to us – by telling about Paul’s experience with Christ? When we think of what it means to be “saved,” we can speak both of what we’re saved from and what we are saved for. For what was the Paul saved? Why do we often think that God cannot or will not work through us if we commit some sin or make a mistake? In what ways can God use our experiences – even our failures and the unfortunate things that happen to us – to speak into others’ lives? [Faith Element](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Luke 15:1-10](#)

Where was the weirdest place you’ve ever found your TV remote, car keys or some other often lost item after they were lost? In our society today, who do you think would represent the sinners and tax collectors? Are there groups of people that society marginalizes and doesn’t see the need to reach out to? Is there a group you could get to know in order to share God’s story? Why do you think the shepherd wasn’t content with just having 99 of his sheep safe? Was it really worth leaving the majority to go search for the one? What does this say about God’s desire for the lost? Why is it so important to remember that no matter how long we have been a believer that we all fall under the same Grace of God as someone who just turned to faith?

[First MB Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Praise God for the Lord who loves
Praise God for the Lord who cares
In the midst of my weakness
When I am lost
Unable to find
Even myself
There is One who seeks
One who finds
Me
The lost
And rejoices in the correction of our folly
Rejoices with the angels
Rejoices with song
Rejoices for us
And with us
Often before we are aware
We were lost
“Isn’t it strange how things happen?”
“It was just one of those days”
“I’ve decided to make a change”
These are the words we use
Rejoice and be glad,
For that which was lost has been found

~ [Pastor Dan’s Grace Notes](#)