

Sunday 11th September 2022

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.
God is ever present, around us and within us,
we worship together in God.

Reading Luke 15:1-10

Reflection 1

Have you ever lost something and worried that you will never find it? In our passage from Luke we have two stories about losing something. These are two parables told by Jesus, parables were designed to leave the listeners with questions rather than giving an answer and yet we often forget this when we read these two stories. They have become embedded in our Christian journey, familiar and well known, comfortable stories that we can tell my heart and so they have lost something of their parable edge. Why did Jesus tell two parables about losing something?

In the first parable we have a shepherd tending 100 sheep, probably not his own sheep, and he discovers one is missing. What would we expect him to do? At least make sure that the other sheep were safe before heading off to find the lost one but we are told he simply left the others and went to find the lost sheep. I always imagine him coming back to find another missing! The shepherd hunted high and low and eventually finds the lost sheep and returns rejoicing. We do that don't we, we celebrate when we find something that we had lost, be it car keys, glasses, a special letter or a favourite hat. But have you ever wondered what the sheep felt? Did it know it was lost? Was it quite happy exploring new ground and felt frustration at being returned to the rest? Sometimes we are not aware we are lost and need to be found.

The second parable deals with a lost coin, and the woman we are led to believe could not afford to lose this coin even though it was of little value. Maybe you have misplaced some money, what did it feel like, how hard did you look for it and what did it feel like when you found it? It struck me as I reread these parables that the meaning may well be lost to many in our modern world. We live in a disposable society where often the value of items is not as great as it once was and people might not be so determined to find them but instead simply replace them. They may regard the actions of the woman and the shepherd as slightly obsessive! And yet there are things which are not easily replaced in today's society, perhaps we need the parable of the lost car keys, or the parable of the lost phone.

Without car keys you cannot drive your car, even when it is keyless, if you cannot drive you may not be able to make your journey and all your plans may change. For many younger people their phone is everything, their point of contact with friends, their access to the internet, their photo album, their diary, their address book. Can you imagine losing all those things at once – how lost would you feel?

One of the key points of these parables is about valuing something so much that you cannot live without it, and you feel lost. We believe that God loves and values every person. If someone is lost, whether they recognise it or not, there is a break in relationship and within God something or someone is missing. God is oneness – a whole and everyone is important, everyone is valued and everyone has a part to play. We can choose not to recognise our oneness and our actions may be less loving because of the decision and the oneness will be affected by our decision but we are still one.

Reading 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Reflection 2

In this reading we glimpse what it felt like for Timothy to recognise he was lost. He utters a prayer of thanks for God's grace even though he feels unworthy of such grace. He was not a good man and made some ill-advised decisions but through the gospel of Jesus he has come to recognise the unconditional nature of God's love. God's love is – we do not have to earn it and we cannot lose it, what a relief.

Timothy knew he had not yet reached the perfection of life that Jesus demonstrated but he was still he was still valued and loved and could try again when he recognised he had strayed. Forgiveness is key to life but it is not so much something done to us as something we do ourselves, we have to first recognise our need for forgiveness, then seek reconciliation and commit to making better choices. Forgiveness is about rebuilding relationships and acknowledging the oneness that is God. We need to understand and accept that God's love is for everyone and everyone is important; everyone is equal in God, we are all the same and forgiveness takes away the power of division.

When we choose to love others we journey deeper into the experience that is God, that is why love is so central to the message of Jesus. When we hurt others through a lack of love, we hurt ourselves because we position ourselves further away from God, and each other. We are choosing to ignore the oneness of creation. God's mercy invites us to enter a different way, the way of love.

Reading Psalm 14 (Psalms for a quantum world)
Some say there is no God,
and show no love in their actions.
Some love but still do not understand
the oneness of humanity and creation.
The eternal presence, source of all being,
knows all, is aware of all and unites all.
Why can we not understand this?
Why do we hurt one another?
Why do we live in fear?
In you there is only love,
and love banishes fear.
In you is justice through oneness,
in hurting others, we hurt ourselves.
When we acknowledge our oneness
we find peace, seek justice and know love.
We are restored to wholeness,
and our humanity flourishes,
Let us be one and rejoice.

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Reflection 3

How do we respond to the invitation to a different way? How can we demonstrate our choice to be love in the world? In the book 'Wonder' by RJ Palacio we are introduced to August, a boy born so disfigured that even after years of surgery his face is still hard to look at. Wonder is the story of his entry into 'normal life' through the harsh environment of school and how through his various experiences and encounters others come to know themselves better. It is not an easy journey but at the end of the book few of the characters are left unchanged and August's new understanding of himself has been a journey of discovery for his family and those around him.

The book includes some important expressions of behaviour and uses some enlightening quotes, among them Confucius – have no friends not equal to yourself, John Donne – no one is an island entire of itself, Blaise Pascal – kind words do not cost much, yet they accomplish much. Kindness is a key theme in the book and we are reminded of JM Barrie's words in his book The Little White bird –'

shall we make a new rule in life... always try to be kinder than necessary'. As Jesus might have put it, it is not enough to be kind, one should be kinder than needed, go the extra mile. Kindness is not quantifiable but it is a choice. It is not enough to be friendly we have to be a friend. Wayne Dwyer says, 'when given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind, your deeds are your monuments'. This is demonstrated in Christopher Nolan's book '@Under the eye of the clock' where a young boy facing extraordinary challenges is helped by another boy, on the face of it a small gesture and yet 'it was at moments such as these that Joseph recognised the face of God in human form. It glimmered in their kindness to him, it glowed in their keenness, it hinted in their caring, indeed it caressed in their gaze.'

Kindness is often ignored and yet it is the key to loving one another, a word of encouragement given at the right time, an act of friendship, a passing smile, all these can be the catalyst to recognising self-worth, recognising the need to be found. The recognition that another person is there, and is worth the effort because in God we are all equal. If everyone took it upon themselves to be kinder than necessary the world would be a very different place. Love is simple and yet never simple for it requires us to be different in our ways and kinder in our outlook. Let us love one another for we are one.