

“The Lost Wallet”

I Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

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There are three parts to this message. First, God comes to seek and save the lost. Second, hope can be the enemy of acceptance. Third, when we accept the reality that we are lost, we are found. If you don't remember anything else about the message today, know that God comes to seek and save the lost: and that is all of us, somewhere, sometime.

A disclaimer to start: those who read the September “Beacon” know how this story ends, since the story of my lost wallet was the lead article. But not all have read it, and those who did will hear things today that were not in it, so here we go.

It is an unsettling thing to lose your wallet. I “lost” my wallet in Manahawkin, New Jersey the morning of June 12. My brothers and I were helping my dad by doing repairs to his Jersey shore cottage. About 11:30 a.m. I realized that the last time I had seen my wallet was about 8 a.m. at the Home Depot. I began to look everywhere in the cottage and made several calls and the 15 mile round trip to the store, finding nothing. But I was passionate about the possibility of finding it!

Jesus told it this way: *“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”* (Luke 15:8-10)

How much the coin was worth? We don't know. The Greek word for “silver coin” is *drachma*, the value of which fluctuated. We **do** know that coinage, even at that late date in history, was rare; rarer still in the possession of a woman in that culture. It would have been a tenth of her wealth in hard currency and, unlike credit cards, impossible to trace

or replace. We can imagine the urgency of her search, especially if we have lost a wallet or something of value.

This is the passion, the urgency and the singular focus with which God comes to save us. As hard as it may be to believe, God loves us this much. We who are always lovely or loving are loved by our Creator who does not give up on us.

This is not always good news. Sometimes we don't want to be found. The Bible is filled with stories of lost folks who don't want God to find them: Adam and Eve, Cain, Jonah, General Naaman and the Prodigal Son, to name a few. It is no accident that these verses about the lost sheep and the lost coin precede the story of the lost sons, otherwise known as the Prodigal Son.

Not only the Bible, but *life* is filled with stories of lost folks who don't want God to find them. Us. You. And me. Sometimes we'd just as soon have God stay out of our business, thank you very much.

The Bible's reply is clear: "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" (I John 1:8) A member of one of my churches didn't pray the prayers of confession: "*I don't pray them because the things they say I don't do,*" she once said to me. "*Not any of them?*" I inquired in disbelief. "*No*" was the self-condemning reply. Yet "*if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" is the next verse. Or as today's epistle stated "*The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners....*"

So the hope that we might somehow not be lost keeps us in denial. This kind of hope is the enemy of acceptance. It surely was with my lost wallet. I hoped I would find it and didn't want to make those calls, but with each passing hour I realized I'd better put holds on my credit cards or cancel them. Finally in the early afternoon I began to do that.

The good news was that no one had tried to use them, so whoever had my wallet was not trying any funny business. I resigned myself to the loss of several hundred dollars (I don't usually have, let alone carry,

that much cash, but had it for this trip!), the nuisance of getting a new license, and my brothers and I finished our work. The next day I borrowed money from my older brother to return home. Boy, was I sad!

Yet, in some odd way, I was free. Letting go of the hope of finding something that I couldn't find freed my heart and mind: to count my blessings; to realize that far worse things could have happened; to re-focus on my return to Connecticut and the home and church joys and responsibilities awaiting me here. In a sense I had surrendered to the situation. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr's *Serenity* prayer I had been given the serenity to accept the thing I could not change.

So, I arrived in Connecticut in time to unpack and get to the Hamden AAA office where they do replacement licenses. "*Let's get this done before tomorrow,*" I thought. Just before I left the house prepared to pay \$30 for the replacement license I went to put my backpack away. "*Funny,*" I thought, "*I thought this was empty. I don't remember the bottom of this being so stiff.*" Feeling around....well, you guessed it: the missing wallet.

Then it all came flooding back. When I came out of the Home Depot the previous morning, I had put the wallet in a hidden pocket at the bottom of the pack. I put it there—of course!—for "safekeeping." I was ECSTATIC over finding that wallet! Even more, I was reminded that when times are tough sometimes the right response is to accept them and focus on what we can do in the situation. Letting go of my frustration and frenzy left me free to unpack, to unload all the stuff I no longer needed for the journey. When I did, what was lost was found.

Here's the other thing: I really do believe this is how God works. God is reaching to us all the time. But our preoccupations and distractions get in the way of hearing the "*still, small voice.*" When we drop those, what is lost becomes found. Remembering this story Jesus told gave me new appreciation for what it means to be reconciled, to turn from destructive behavior, to embrace faith and to be "found." Jesus came to seek and save the lost: good news for us all, even those with bad memories! Thanks be to God!