

November 10, 2019  
Walking with God: PSEC Retreat  
Luke 15:8-10  
“Proclamations, Opinions and a Broom”  
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God has been portrayed as many things, even as a Merry Maid. At first hearing, you wonder if someone has made a mistake regarding the Almighty. Yet, it is a representation of God that God would not have us miss. That’s why God made sure it got into holy writ, sandwiched in between the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son; maybe like the sandwich filling between the two slices of bread.

As a Merry Maid, I am not sure whether God had a blue blouse and an apron. But, I am sure of this God had a broom (note not a dustpan) for there would be no throwing away or discarding with this maid. And, God had a lamp, to make sure God could see into the shadows.

Let’s begin our looking and searching regarding the coin with the woman who lost the coin. Scholars tell us these coins were worth about ten days wages (in other words the family savings) or they may have been her dowry. Any way you call it, this woman’s future was at stake.

Could it not be that you have lost a coin too? Your talent, passion, or uniqueness has gone missing, lost, due to your inner critic. Yet, do not give up hope. God is going to help you find it.

Your inner critic is a distorted mirror. It is that inner voice that criticizes you, and speaks about you in disparaging ways.

The job of the inner critic is to keep you unhappy and ineffective, wearing down your mood, self-worth and resilience. This voice stops all growth.

Let's move on to the Merry Maid's lamp, its purpose is to shed light.. Sometimes between our birth and now, we got lost. Probably for most of us that precious thing was covered over as a child. For others of us, we realize we lost it, but we don't know when. All we know is we don't seem to have it now.

Your inner critic loves to focus on mistakes. One of the inner critic's favorite questions is: "What will people think?" Problem is we are looking to others to figure out who we should be.

What kinds of things is the inner critic known to say,  
 "You're not good enough."  
 "Anyone could have done that."  
 "You're such a mess, you can't do anything right."

(?) What else does the inner critic say?

Our inner critic takes up residence when we, absorb the judgments of the people around us, and the expectations of the society in which we live. The inner critic may first resemble a parent, sibling, relative, teacher, coach, classmate, teammate... In time, the inner critic may no longer have a face, yet its dark cloud still hangs over us.

Yet, let's not despair, for the Merry Maid is not just equipped with a lamp to help us see what is lurking in the shadows, but she is also equipped with a broom. Which is just what is needed. We may worry our coin is gone, and we will never find

it again. Have faith in the Merry Maid, who will not give up till the lost part of you is retrieved and back in your possession.

Our inner critic is the dust and dirt that gets all over our coin, to the point that it is almost invisible. Yet, the lamp (shedding light on the wiles and strategies used by your inner critic to keep you in the dark) will shine on you and that little bit of metallic still visible will glisten, and then be discovered. underneath our feet, and never again to completely cover us.

I can hear the woman's inner critic say to her not only when she lost the coin, "You're such a screw up, never can do anything right."

But also, when she got the coin back, "You're sure to lose it again." "With your track record, you're sure never to have a bright future."

As a counter-move, the Merry Maid was heard to say to the coin owner quoting the book of Jeremiah, "For I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Our inner critic's original job was to save us from shame and pain. Yet, the inner critic has decided that is not good enough, so instead of being a passenger or trying to be a back seat driver, the inner critic makes pronouncement, not just merely share an opinion or feelings. We must not let the inner critic drive or handle the map or even touch the dial on the radio.

So, how do we handle our inner critic, so we can be all God made us to be? Try one or more of these strategies next time your inner critic raises its ugly head:

- Use a forward looking strategy

Think about what would be the negative consequence(s) if you gave into your inner critic.

- Shift your attention  
Divert your attention away from the inner critic. In other words, allow your attention to be grabbed by something else.
- Talk back to your inner critic. Do not let your inner critic have the last word. Take the proclamations of your inner critic and make some positive proclamations of your own about yourself.

Let me end, with this story.

It was time for the dilapidated zoo to get a new zookeeper. The whole zoo had fallen into disrepair. So, the first thing the new zookeeper did was to look in on the zebra enclosure with the broom and lamp in hand. There, Merry/Mary saw nothing but dust for the zebras were filthy dirty with barely a resemblance of black and white. A man who worked at the zoo came by and said to her, "Why are you bothering to look at them, they're nothing special, plus they all look the same", as he walked away. Merry looked even closer now at the zebras and saw something glistening beneath the dirt. She turned on the hose, and zebra after zebra revealed stripes of brilliant colors beneath the grime, which was covering them up. Merry/Mary Maid, the zookeeper, threw a big party and invited the whole town to come to see and celebrate what she had found.

May we too be able to celebrate and say, that which has been lost, has been found." "Hallelujah. Thanks be to God."