

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

September 15, 2019, The 14th Sunday After Pentecost/The 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 13, Luke 15:1-10

SOUGHT AND FOUND

In the 1500's St. Teresa of Avila in Spain wrote these words that have been an important part of my faith journey since seminary days. I have shared them with you many times, and will again this morning, with their wonderful invitation:

Christ has no body but yours,
 No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
 Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
 Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
 Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
 Christ has no body now but yours.

--St. Theresa of Avila

This week I have been spending time with the story in Luke's Gospel. For a good part of his ministry Jesus dealt with fitting in because people just couldn't figure out why he did what he did, and why he said what he said, and who he chose to spend time with.

He was constantly coming up against what the teachers of the Jewish law and the priests thought about him, and his ministry

The people he cared for and invited to join him did not fit their idea of who should be accepted into the kingdom of God, let alone accepted into their presence.

In the story from today Jesus was teaching the people who had gathered. And they all looked the same to him, because all of them were trying to hear the words of God, and all of them were cherished children of God.

But the religious leaders criticized Jesus for welcoming any kind of person, and even eating with them, instead of only choosing those who were good enough at following all of the rules of God completely.

In the face of their judgment about who was in and who was out, Jesus told the stories we read this morning.

He did this by asking them a question that they all would have answered the same way: "If you had a flock of 100 sheep and one of them went missing, which one of you wouldn't leave the 99 to go and search for the one that was lost. And then once you'd found it, wouldn't you celebrate with your neighbors and friends?"

Of course, you would Jesus implied, "yes, of course we would," all the people answered.

"Or if you had ten silver coins, each one the pay for one day's work, and one of those coins went missing, wouldn't all of you look for it. Then when it was found, wouldn't all of you celebrate with your friends and neighbors that the coin was found?"

Of course, the crowd agreed: “yes of course we’d leave the 99 for search for the one lost lamb. And we’d clean the house until we found the missing coin.”

And having pulled them in with his questions, Jesus turned to these priests and Bible teachers and said: “there is more joy in heaven, and more joy in the presence of the angels of God over just one person you are labeling as a sinner, who turns around and comes to God. God’s celebrations are for those that need help, those that want to turn their lives around, those that know they need God in their lives.

Jesus said to those staunch, judgmental, church people: “you think you know who is in and who is out, but you just don’t realize that heaven rejoices every time one of these people who was lost is found.”

Jesus was saying to them: “you don’t understand God’s love,
because if you did you would understand why I am spending time
with these people whom God loves.”

At the beginning of this week I thought that today I would be talking about all the ways that Jesus comes after us when we are lost, looking for us until we are found and held once more in the loving arms of Jesus’ love.

That’s where I started,
and it is a place I have started sermons on this passage before.

And let me say that in the seasons of our lives when we feel lost
this image of Jesus looking for us
is one of the best places to start
to remember that nothing can separate from the love of Christ.

But that is not where I ended up with this passage this week;
because halfway through the week the poem by St. Teresa of Avila that I read at the beginning of the sermon kept showing up in my head.

And I began to wonder. What if we are now meant to be the ones who are
the seekers and searchers for the lost
and celebrators of the found?

During his lifetime Jesus told his disciples and followers that whenever they cared for those in need, the hungry, those in prison, those without homes or clothes, those who were lost and scared, they were caring for him.

At the end of his life on earth Jesus washed his disciple’s feet and told them to go and do the same for others.

We who follow Jesus are meant to embody Jesus’ love and life and
in the ways we love and serve others.

We are meant to be Jesus here on earth
for those people God puts into our lives;
the ones who are in our inner circle of family and friends,
AND especially those who are outside of our circle,
And definitely those we think are outside of God’s love.

I can remember one of my college professors telling us that Martin Luther, of the Reformation fame, told those he taught that they should be “little Christs” for each other.

Luther wrote about Christians with these words:

“Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because he dwells in us, that is,
 because we believe in him
 and are Christs one to another
 and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.”

We are called to belong to Christ in our daily living, and to be little Christs for each other as we become the seekers and searchers for the lost, and celebrators of the found.

And what I came to realize this week, is this:

we can be the seekers and searchers for the lost and celebrators of the found for others

because Jesus has already found us.

We gather together week by week to worship our God because we have been found.

As we sing in the hymn Amazing Grace, “I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.”

We know what it is to be found by the love of Christ
 and now we are sent out to show others the way.

As followers of Jesus we are now commissioned to be the seekers and searchers for the lost and celebrators of the found.

Christ has no body now on earth but ours!

There is a wonderful picture of what this looks like in an obituary that I read in the Huffington Post back in 2013. Back then I shared part of it with you in a sermon and I’d like to do the same thing again this morning, because it is so good. In the obituary of Mary Mullaney, an 85-year-old Wisconsin woman who died back in 2013 we see a picture of someone who chose to use her life to seek and find those who needed to know love.

She went by her nickname, which was “Pink,” and her family wrote a unique and wonderful tribute to her life.

And in their writing, they have given us a picture of what it means when we are “little Christs” for each other,

It begins with these eye-catching words:

If you’re about to throw away an old pair of pantyhose, stop. Consider: Mary Agnes Mullaney (you probably knew her as “Pink”) who entered eternal life on Sunday, September 1, 2013. Her spirit is carried on by her six children, 17 grandchildren, three surviving siblings, and an extended family of relations and friends from every walk of life. We were blessed to learn many valuable lessons from Pink during her 85 years, among them: Never throw away old pantyhose. Use the old ones to tie gutters, child-proof cabinets, tie toilet flappers, or hang Christmas ornaments.

Also: If a possum takes up residence in your shed, grab a barbecue brush to coax him out. If he doesn’t leave, brush him for twenty minutes and let him stay.

Let a dog (or two or three) share your bed. Pray (Say the rosary) while you walk them.

Go to church with a chicken sandwich in your purse. Cry at Communion (the consecration), every time. Give the chicken sandwich to your homeless friend after church (mass).

Go to a nursing home and kiss everyone. When you learn someone's name, share their patron saint's story, and their feast day, so they can celebrate. Invite new friends to Thanksgiving dinner. If they are from another country and you have trouble understanding them, learn to "listen with an accent."

Never say mean things about anybody; they are "poor souls to pray for."

Put picky-eating children in the box at the bottom of the laundry chute, tell them they are hungry lions in a cage, and feed them veggies through the slats.

Correspond with the imprisoned and have lunch with the cognitively challenged...

Offer rides to people carrying a big load or caught in the rain or summer heat. Believe the hitchhiker you pick up who says he is a landscaper and his name is "Peat Moss."

Help anyone struggling to get their kids into a car or shopping cart or across a parking lot.

Give to every charity that asks. Choose to believe the best about what they do with your money, no matter what your children say they discovered online.

Allow the homeless to keep warm in your car while you are at Church (Mass).

Take magazines you've already read to your doctors' office for others to enjoy. Do not tear off the mailing label, "Because if someone wants to contact me, that would be nice."

In her lifetime, Pink made contact time after time. Those who've taken her lessons to heart will continue to ensure that a cold drink will be left for the overheated garbage collector and mail carrier, every baby will be kissed, every nursing home resident will be visited, the hungry will have a sandwich, the guest will have a warm bed and soft nightlight, and the encroaching possum will know the soothing sensation of a barbecue brush upon its back...

She is survived by her children and grandchildren whose photos she would share with prospective friends in the checkout line: and many in-laws, nieces, nephews, friends and family too numerous to list but not forgotten.

Pink is reunited with her husband and favorite dance and political debate partner, Dr. Gerald L. Mullaney

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/07/grandparents-day-2013_n_3887074.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular

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Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours.

--St. Theresa of Avila

We are Jesus' body now,

we are called to be "little Christs" for absolutely everyone God puts in our path.

We are the seekers and searchers for the lost, and celebrators of the found.

For once, we were lost, but now we're found. Amen.

*One of the early books by Martin Luther was *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520). In it, he wrote, "[A]s our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians...."*

<http://sandystrachan.wordpress.com/2013/03/10/little-christs/>

This Incredible Obituary May Be The Best Thing You Read All Week



Mary A. "Pink" Mullaney was an 85-year-old Wisconsin woman who died on Sept. 1, leaving behind six children and 17 grandchildren. So adored was she by her family members that they crafted one of the loveliest obituaries we've ever read. It begins with "if you're about to throw away an old pair

of pantyhose, stop" -- and only grows more colorful and strangely inspirational from there.

"We wanted something that showed who she was," explained [daughter Maryanne](#) to WAOW.com.

"We said, 'how can we be like her and carry her pinkness across?'"

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Let a dog (or two or three) share your bed. Say the rosary while you walk them.

Go to church with a chicken sandwich in your purse. Cry at the consecration, every time. Give the chicken sandwich to your homeless friend after mass.

Go to a nursing home and kiss everyone. When you learn someone's name, share their patron saint's story, and their feast day, so they can celebrate. Invite new friends to Thanksgiving dinner. If they are from another country and you have trouble understanding them, learn to "listen with an accent."

Never say mean things about anybody; they are "poor souls to pray for."

Put picky-eating children in the box at the bottom of the laundry chute, tell them they are hungry lions in a cage, and feed them veggies through the slats.

Correspond with the imprisoned and have lunch with the cognitively challenged.

Do the Jumble every morning.

Keep the car keys under the front seat so they don't get lost.

Make the car dance by lightly tapping the brakes to the beat of songs on the radio.

Offer rides to people carrying a big load or caught in the rain or summer heat. Believe the hitchhiker you pick up who says he is a landscaper and his name is "Peat Moss."

Help anyone struggling to get their kids into a car or shopping cart or across a parking lot.

Give to every charity that asks. Choose to believe the best about what they do with your money, no matter what your children say they discovered online.

Allow the homeless to keep warm in your car while you are at Mass.

Take magazines you've already read to your doctors' office for others to enjoy. Do not tear off the mailing label, "Because if someone wants to contact me, that would be nice."

In her lifetime, Pink made contact time after time. Those who've taken her lessons to heart will continue to ensure that a cold drink will be left for the overheated garbage collector and mail carrier, every baby will be kissed, every nursing home resident will be visited, the hungry will have a sandwich, the guest will have a warm bed and soft nightlight, and the encroaching possum will know the soothing sensation of a barbecue brush upon its back.

Above all, Pink wrote -- to everyone, about everything. You may read this and recall a letter from her that touched your heart, tickled your funny bone, or maybe made you say "huh?"

She is survived by her children and grandchildren whose photos she would share with prospective friends in the checkout line: Tim (wife Janice, children Timmy, Joey, T.J., Miki and Danny); Kevin (wife Kathy, children Kacey, Ryan, Jordan and Kevin); Jerry (wife Gita, children Nisha and Cathan); MaryAnne; Peter (wife Maria Jose, children Rodrigo and Paulo); and Meg (husband David Vartanian, children Peter, Lily, Jerry and Blase); siblings Anne, Helen, and Robert; and many in-laws, nieces, nephews, friends and family too numerous to list but not forgotten.

Pink is reunited with her husband and favorite dance and political debate partner, Dr. Gerald L. Mullaney, and is predeceased by six siblings.

See also sr-13-09-15