

Disciples Seek People for Christ and Church

September 15, 2019

Theme: Evangelize with integrity.

Scripture: Luke 15: 1-10

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ "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? ⁹ 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.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."



Today we continue with week two of our Fall

Discipleship Series. Last week I spoke about counting

the cost of discipleship and carrying our crosses. Over

the course of the past week you were first invited, through the GPS questions, to consider the costs you have paid and how this led to growth in your faith.

Second, you were asked to consider what dilemma you were facing and to take that to God in prayer. And, third, you were encouraged to serve someone who you find hard to love. The seventh-grade former track athlete that I spoke of last week – do you remember her? - set her faith as her priority. As you reflected on last Sunday's message over the course of this past week and as you gave time and attention to your journey of faith, pondering the GPS questions, were you encouraged? Were you challenged? These are some of the things that disciples do. To use Kyle Edelman's terminology, were you a fan or were you a follower this past week? Let us pray...



Do you recognize these two? The fish on the right is Nemo and the bigger fish on the left is his dad. In the story, Nemo's father loved him very much. He watched over Nemo and protected him from every evil. Nemo and his dad were best friends. These are a couple of the reasons why so many people enjoy the blockbuster hit Finding Nemo. In case you have not seen Finding Nemo, it is the powerful story of the sacrificial love of a mother and of the determination of a caring father. It is the story of being lost, and then found. It is a story that can help us understand God and his love for you and me.

One day, Nemo disobeys his father and swims beyond the reef. He was suddenly scooped up by a diver and taken away on a boat. Nemo's disobedience caused him to be separated from his father. Nemo was so sad because there was nothing he could do to get back to his father. Nemo ended up in fish tank in a dentist's office overlooking the Sydney Harbor. His situation seemed hopeless.

The father loved little Nemo so much that it did not matter how big the ocean was, or how many fish there were. He was determined to save Nemo and set out on an incredible adventure to seek and save little Nemo, his one and only son. His journey became the talk of all the fish and birds. The good news of this heroic father traveling the ocean in search of his lost son finally reached Nemo through a pelican named Nigel.

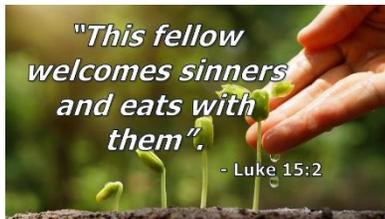


Nemo was so surprised and thrilled to learn of his father's love and search for him. However, Nemo knew that time was running out. The dentist's destructive niece Darla was set to pick up Nemo as a pet. Darla was known for abusing her pet fish until they went belly up. With a strong desire to return to his father, and the encouragement from his new friends in the fish tank, he eventually took an amazing step of faith. He jumped out of the fish tank, down the water drain that led to the ocean. The father's love drew Nemo in the right direction. Once in the ocean, Nemo was reunited with old friend Dory. Dory also knew Nemo's father, and she led little Nemo to him. There was so much happiness when Nemo was at last saved and home with his loving father.



In today's scripture we find two stories that Jesus tells about the lost being found and heaven's response. As I turn to today's scripture, I invite you to turn to Luke 15 in your Bible. In the first ten verses of Luke 15 we read about the shepherd who lost a sheep and the woman who lost her coin. These two stories, plus the story

of the prodigal son that follows these, are told in response to statement that Pharisees and the scribes make about Jesus. Upon noticing that the tax collectors and other sinners were gathering around Jesus, they grumble, saying,



"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them".

What "this fellow" is doing is certainly something the Pharisees and scribes definitely would not do – associate with known sinners. You know, they might touch you and make you unclean yourself. And that would be horrible.

Jesus' response is to first tell the story of the lost sheep. Throughout the Old Testament and the culture of the day, the shepherd-sheep relationship was very common and well understood. The religious leaders, the sinners, and the tax collectors would know all about the relationship between sheep and shepherds. You are familiar with the story that we find in verses three through seven. One day there is a sheep that wanders off from the flock. Noticing that one is

missing the shepherd searches until he finds the one lost sheep. The shepherd rescues the lost sheep and returns to the flock, rejoicing that the lost sheep has been found. This is not really a story about a lost sheep though. Just as it does with us, the nice story of a kindly shepherd leaving the ninety-nine to go searching for and to save his poor, lost, little sheep draws the



audience in. Probably the religious leaders did not even sense the sharp turn that Jesus was about to take. Via Luke, Jesus tells us, *"there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance"*. Can you see the satisfaction on the shepherd's face

now that the flock is all together? Because the shepherd-sheep metaphor is common in the Old Testament, the religious leaders and even the sinners and tax collectors would get what Jesus was implying very easily. Those charged with caring for the sheep have a great responsibility towards the sheep. The Pharisees and other religious leaders were charged with the spiritual care of the people. They were to teach them, to guide them, to offer them redirection when needed, to be a conduit to restore them into right relationship with God. The religious leaders were very good at caring for their own. But these sinners and tax collectors? Don't they belong to someone else's flock?

The same basic message is found in the story of the lost coin. The idea of seeking the lost is a key component of Jesus' ministry and is a central theme of the gospel. A woman loses one coin. The woman is distraught that she has lost



one of her coins. She still has nine, though. That's 90% - still pretty good, right? But it is not good enough for her. She lights the lamp and searches the house carefully until she finds the lost coin. Then, same as in the first story, she rejoices as the angels in heaven rejoice over the one who has been found. That 90% thing – it was more than the religious leaders of the day

concerned themselves with. Those that were like them, those that followed the law, those that gave enough to the temple or synagogue – yes, we care about them. The rest? The 10+%? Well... And here "this fellow" sits and eats with those on the edge, those outside the accepted circles. Neither the Pharisees or the sinners or the tax collectors miss Jesus' point here either. The question for us today is: do we?



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Do we miss Jesus' point? Do we understand that Jesus is saying that as disciples we are to seek to connect the lost to the Savior, the broken to the Redeemer, and both to a church? To our church? A lot of churches focus much of their time, energy, resources... on the ninety-nine and on the nine. I think a big part of that is because evangelism – one of two things, along with discipleship, that make a church a church and not a crowd – is scary. To go out and engage those who are living in sin is intimidating. What if they are interested? To go out and to invite people to church is frightening. What if they say 'no'? What if they say 'yes'? Will your friends ask you who invited that person to church?



*"To bring people to
Christ...
To help people
grow deep in
Christ..."*

Do you recognize this? This is the call that Jesus made clear in Matthew 28, verses nineteen and twenty. Here Jesus says, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"*. Bring people to Christ. Teach them, helping them to grow deep in Christ. Yes, evangelism can be scary. But evangelism is one of the key practices that disciples of Jesus Christ must engage in. Like carrying our cross, I do not believe that evangelism is optional. It is simply one of the things that disciples do.

This morning I would like to help you to become an evangelist. I am going to share three ways that Christians and churches can be evangelists. Maybe one way will come more naturally to you. Maybe another way will come more easily

to you. Maybe all three will seem like carrying a cross. If so, remember, we are called to do that too. I hope that one of these forms of evangelism is one that you will practice in the days and weeks ahead. Better yet, you will practice all three of these as you seek to live into this church' mission.

The first way that Christians and churches can evangelize is called *lifestyle evangelism*. This is one of the best ways that we can

witness to our faith. Simply put, when we live like Christ, we are testifying to our faith. When we live lives of love, grace, compassion, integrity, empathy, service,

and social justice then we are bearing witness to our faith. This is what we talked about last week- being will to surrender our will to God's will and to live not for ourselves but for Christ. Lifestyle evangelism will lead people to see our lives and to think, *If that is what Christianity looks like, then I'm interested*. As Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary". Be a living witness to your faith. Model Jesus.



The second way that Christians and churches can evangelize is called *relational evangelism*. This is NOT about giving a sales pitch or

pressuring people or about annoying them until they give in and come to church with you. We all have folks in our social networks, people that we have

relationships with. Relational evangelism looks for opportunities to share our faith naturally with the people we know. It can be as simple as offering to pray



for someone when they seem down or when you know that are going through a rough or difficult time. It can be as simple as offering a listening ear followed by a word or two of encouragement. It can be as simple as bringing a hot dish over to their home when there is a loss or at another time when you know there is a need. It can be as simple as sharing why you have peace in the storm or calm in the middle of the trying situation or why you choose to serve others. We all have opportunities, through our relationships, to share our faith with others. We must also remember one very important fact. Once we too were all lost and Jesus found us. We have been the sheep and the coin. We have been lost and now we are found. We know what a difference that made and continues to make in our lives. This is the gift we can offer to another who is lost.

The third way that Christians and churches can evangelize is called *invitational evangelism*. This is the "come and see" form of evangelism. The invitation can be for a wide number of things. You can invite someone to worship, to small group, to VBS, to a potluck, to President's Day Dinner, to a special event like Trunk or Treat, or to a special worship service like Good Friday, Maundy Thursday, or Blue Christmas. This is a simple and very effective way to share our faith. Studies show that about 90% of the people who first visit a church do so because someone personally invited them to come. And because I love you, I'm going to share an insider tip. If you want to increase your success rate, offer to pick them up and to bring them to church or to that small group or to whatever event you are coming to. To walk in the door with someone you know makes it incredibly easier to walk through the door.



- 1) Lifestyle evangelism.
- 2) Relational evangelism.
- 3) Invitational evangelism.

A man was once asked if Jesus was his personal savior. His response is great: "No, I prefer to share him". Would that be your response too?



As I loop back to our scripture for today, a story to close that illustrates that, yes, Jesus cares about the one lost sheep and the one lost coin. As disciples of Christ, we too are called to care for the lost and the broken, for the hurting and the lonely. We are to seek all people for Christ and for the church.

Years ago, there was a bag lady in New York City who attended a preaching service at the Manhattan Rescue Mission. Afterwards in the line to receive soup, she mentioned to the preacher that she was now ready to give her life to Jesus. She said, "I never knew until today that my name is in the Bible."

The preacher smiled and said, "What's your name?" She said, "Edith. My name is Edith. And my name is in the Bible." The preacher said, "I'm sorry ma'am but you must be mistaken. The name Edith never appears in the Bible."

She said, "Oh yes it does, you read it a few minutes ago!" He opened his Bible and she pointed her dirty finger to Luke 15:2. The preacher had been using the King James Version, and it says, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." She said, "There it is! Jesus receiveth sinners and Edith with them!"

Indeed, the good news for you and for me and for all people is that Jesus does receive sinners, and Edith, and David, and Jane, and Mary, and Paul and anyone else who comes to Him! In these two stories, we have seen a wonderful picture of what God is like. He is a God who regrets our rebellion, who seeks us out when we are lost, and who restores us when we repent and return to him. Yes, Jesus is indeed our Savior and Redeemer.

But, he is also the Savior and Redeemer of the world – all of it. Whether we practice lifestyle evangelism or relational evangelism or invitational evangelism or all three, may we share Jesus accordingly this week. As we do so, may our spirit hear the rejoicing in heaven over each sinner that repents. This is why we need to evangelize - lifestyle, relationally, and invitationally. May we each seek people for Christ and for his church. May it be so. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Grow. Which style of evangelism - lifestyle, relational, or invitational – best suits your personality? How will you practice this style this week?
- 2) Pray. Who do you know that is lost? Broken? Lonely? Hurting? Bring them before your Jesus and their Jesus each day this week.
- 3) Serve. Service is often the path to evangelism. Who can you serve in a small way this week that might open the door for a faith conversation?