

Exodus 32:7-14  
1 Timothy 1:1-10  
Luke 15:1-10

Rev. Nathan Anderson  
Pentecost 14c  
September 15, 2019

"Time to see the fairness of a children's game.  
Time to let our friends know, we'd like to do the same.  
Time to make our minds up, if the world at last will be  
Ally, ally ally ally oxen free."

Do you remember playing the game "Hide and Seek? How long has it been? Has it been years, perhaps since childhood? Adults don't often play "Hide and Seek," not for fun, anyway. They take getting lost seriously, making it difficult for others to find them.

Did you have a kid in the neighborhood of your childhood who always hid so well, nobody could find him? A favorite author of mine, Robert Fulgham, claims he did, saying: "After awhile we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up, all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad back because he wasn't playing the game the way it was supposed to be played. There's hiding and there's finding, we'd say. And he'd say it was hide-and-peek, not hide-and-give-up, and we'd all yell about who made up the rules and who cared about who, anyway, and how we wouldn't play with him anymore if he didn't get it straight and who needed him anyhow, and things like that. Hide-and-peek-and yell. No matter what, though, the next time he would hide too good again." The author claims as far as he knew, the kid is still hidden somewhere.

In the very first month I came here to All Saints, twenty-seven years ago, my family wound up playing "Hide and Seek" here at Church, after Services. Only Diane and I didn't realize it. Almost everyone had gone, except for the offering counters in the corner room behind the fellowship hall. Our son Matthew was just 2 and a half years old, and he was being attentive to the baby of a couple with whom we were talking. But when we turned around to claim him, Matthew was gone from sight. We called his name, with no response. Diane searched the basement. I checked the sanctuary, the offices and bathrooms. He wasn't in the nursery or with the Counters. They joined the search, and we circled the building outside; scanning the horizons. Anxiety hit: fear, guilt and frustration. Where could he be? What could have happened? Diane was outdoors calling his name as loud as she could, with a look of panic in her eyes I'd never seen before. Prayers raced in my head as I returned to the Fellowship Hall. Then suddenly I heard a little whisper: "I'm over here."

Where the library now exists, there were room dividers on wheels stacked up against the wall, behind which Matthew had stood as quiet as a mouse, hidden from view. I quickly retrieved Diane, as one of the Counters coaxed him out. Then we hugged our son gratefully, trying to refrain from chewing him out with our pent-up stress. We explained how important it is to come when we call his name, and how afraid we were that he was lost. "I'm not lost," he replied. I was hiding."

Our Gospel lesson tells two parables, one about the lost coin and the other about the lost sheep. The stories first reveal how people get lost in different ways... some like sheep, who usually don't have any great rebellion in mind against the shepherd. They just wander along, heedless of danger, seeing one tuft of grass over there which looks better than this tuft here, never looking up to see where they are going, and finally ending up on the edge of a cliff or down in some swamp where they never in the world intended to be. A good shepherd knows how sheep stray: they just nibble themselves lost.

Other people are like coins, getting lost through someone's carelessness and neglect, mishandled with insensitivity, and then wind up stuck in some forgotten corner. They may feel like they were told to get lost, and don't particularly want to be hurt again.

Both these examples happen in life, even within Christian community of the church. Mistakes and misunderstandings happen whenever two or more people are in relationship. It seems our human nature sometimes forget to play by the rules. And our egos get in the way, refusing to seek out those who drop out of sight when we should make amends. Or if we are the ones in hiding, we insist to ourselves how we're not lost, and get mad if others aren't making a big enough effort to look for us. It's a silly game, and it's no fun to be good at it, because what we really want is to get found. Being alone, cut off from others, is much like being lost, even if you think you know where you are.

Perhaps you know where some other lost sheep persons are, but don't seek them out because you're uncertain what to say to them. Jesus tells us the proper response to lost coins and lost sheep is rejoicing, a welcoming acceptance. Consider again the example of the housekeeper and shepherd. Don't give up, but be of good courage. Our Lord promises to make each of us an ambassador of hospitality.

I can think of many in my life who've been in the role of shepherds and housekeepers, caring for my needs and redirecting my path. By their tears and by their joy, I have learned how much they care ... and how much God cares by placing these people in my life. Then I wanted to be like them.

Not everyone who becomes a found coin will be a coin collector, or a good housekeeper. Not all found sheep become shepherds. But for those who know the joy of the Good Shepherd, who brings us back into His fold, carrying us on His shoulders, it's time we invite neighbors and friends: "Come and rejoice with me, so your lives may also be blessed with joy."

This is the invitation of Good News we have to share. May we at All Saints become known for such caring hospitality, a place filled with the kind of housekeepers and shepherds inspired by today's Scripture Parables. Will you seek the people you know who may still be victims of playing "Hide and Seek?"

Time to see the fairness of a children's game.  
Time to let our friends know, we'd like to do the same.  
Time to make our minds up, if the world at last will be  
Ally, ally, ally ally oxen free.  
Ally, ally, ally ally oxen free."

Amen.