

15th September 2013 – Wesley 10.30 am – Pentecost 17

Theme: “The ‘lost’ and the ‘found’ – where would you go to meet Jesus?”

Reading: Luke 15:1-10 ‘The lost sheep and the lost coin’ or is it
‘the found sheep and the found coin’?

Introduction

For those of you who know me, you’ll know that I enjoy a good joke and on occasions have been known to play a few ‘tricks’ on friends and colleagues. My children learnt this early in their lives, ‘beware of Dad, sometimes he tricks you!’ I can’t remember the scenario specifically but obviously I had played a joke on them when they were young, Rebecca was maybe 6 or 7 and Jason 4 or 5. Anyhow the upshot was they decided to play a trick on me. They hid my Sunday church shoes, my good ones. They did this early in the week and with nothing having happened forgot all about their joke on Dad. Sunday comes along and I go to get my shoes, which were always in the same spot in the wardrobe, but not this time. I searched ‘high and low’ for those shoes, Asked Annette if she had seen them (which received only a suspicious glance with an air of ‘they are your shoes, what have you done with them expression?’).

I can’t remember what I wore to church that Sunday on my feet but it wasn’t my good shoes. In fact the following week I had to go out and buy new shoes. Some three years later, when moving house, we found those shoes stuffed down behind a chest of drawers as the removalists took out the furniture. There was simply a matter of fact response from Rebecca, “O that’s right, we hid those years ago Dad in response to something you did to us kids – glad you’ve finally found them – we had forgotten about them!”

But God doesn’t ever forget about the lost and Jesus tells two poignant parables in response to ‘the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttering, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”’

Modern Context

In my reading around what others had to say on our Gospel for today I came across the following titled “Where would you go to meet Jesus?” This is from the book ‘Sermons on the Gospel Readings’, CSS Publishing, 2009, pp333-4. The author writes:

“I remember reading in a church development book some time ago of the experiences of a church planter who spent a whole lot of his time in bars. Don’t get me wrong. He didn’t even drink! What this church planter decided right off the bat was that he would not seek out ready-made Christians (although they were welcome) but that he would go after the lost. He would go after people that most churches avoided - (and people who mostly avoided churches!) This man, despite the grumbling of the church Pharisees and scribes, welcomed sinners and ate with them. As a result of spending time outside the church (in coffee shops, libraries, malls – not just bars!) rather than inside the church, he grew the congregation. A side benefit was that he found some great musicians in house bands that were willing to play at church on Sunday morning. The church planter pleads for the clergy to get out of their offices and to seek out those who wouldn’t normally be caught dead in church.

It reminds me of the story of the man who lost a coin and was out on the footpath on his hands and knees looking for it under the street light. A friend came along and offered to help and so also got on his hands and knees and asked him, “So where exactly did you lose this coin?” The man with his nose still to the ground replied, ‘In the house.’ “Then why in the world are we looking for it out here?” ‘That’s a silly question. The light is better out here!’

Isn't this what happens too often in the church? We create great worship spaces, buildings, have good music and expect people to come to us. All the while, the ones who are lost are outside and we never see them

What would happen to our church if we focussed on those outside these walls rather than making sure that each of us received exactly what we wanted from the church?

Now I realise that this might not be exactly the kind of message you came looking for this morning. I understand that, I really do. I have a hard time going to places where I might need to step out of my comfort zone

Just maybe we are called, despite the grumblings of the Pharisees and the scribes among us, to welcome sinners and to eat with them!"

Personal Reflection

As a sometimes Pharisee and scribe, this made me feel a little uncomfortable as I reflected on these words.

It made me ask the question: "When have I got out of my office this past week and mixed intentionally but informally with others.

I went through my diary and came up with the following list:

- On Monday I shared as 'grumps' with my grandson as part of Whippersnappers Playgroup. A wonderful way to share with a bunch of people, most who have little church background.
- Tuesday I visited one of the hospitals to see one of our much loved people. While there I also shared with an acquaintance from the past I happened to meet who talked about some of their personal issues.
- On Wednesday I shared with a beautiful family who were grieving deeply over the death of their 21 year old son – it was a privilege to be invited into their grief
- On Thursday I was at HMAS Harman as the Navy Chaplain for a while. There a young woman asked if I would do the Prepare course for her and her partner as they were getting married and their priest wasn't able to do this with them.
- On Friday I had lunch with a young man who has been recovering from severe mental health issues and wanted to celebrate with me, after 18 months of illness, that he had just secured a job again and begins work on the 1st October.

In amongst this is the work I get paid to do in the Parish!! Yet it is a timely reminder to me, not to get so caught up in the maintenance of parish life that I fail to see beyond, into God's world, where there are so many of the 'lost' for whatever reason. Also there is the call to celebrate 'the found' when that occurs and to praise God.

Conclusion

Poem – "Finders Keepers" by Bruce Prewer (2012)

A foolish thing – this wandering sheep
face to the stubble
nibble after nibble:
then by its own stupidity, becomes bleatingly lost.

A well worn thing – this silver coin
passed around from hand to hand;
then by some simple accident becomes silently lost.

A wondrous thing – this Shepherd grace
not giving up
though bruised and torn;
then like an Easter shout of joy, heaven toasts one lost soul found!