

Good Morning.

As many of you know, I am a member-in-discernment. That means that I am seeking God's plan and path for me by pursuing studies through the Maine School of Ministry. These studies may lead to ordination. There are many days when I believe that God's plan for me is some sort of pastoral role.

Then there are those other days when I feel adrift, in a very small boat, in a great ocean. I can hear the sound of a bell buoy bouncing around in the fog bank. I cannot tell where or how to go.

I know only what I believe. I know only what my heart and my love of God and Christ, say to me. I do not pretend to know what is in the thoughts of each of you. I do not know what our future holds. I know only that we are forgiven and that God is with us.

The lectionary provides a choice of Bible texts to preach from for each Sunday.

I chose to base my sermon today on Luke 15, as the lectionary indicated. Luke chapter 15 provides us three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. But today's lectionary guide instructs us to use the first two parables, only.

At first, I felt that wasn't really fair, because the parable of the prodigal son seems to provide more bang for our buck, than just the first two parables. But we are not supposed to include that third one, the prodigal son, in today's discussion.

Then, I thought, perhaps we are to sit with, and pray about, and feel, just loss. In both of the parables, the lost sheep and the lost coin, there is a happy ending.

The owners of the sheep and the coin expended great effort looking for the lost. The sheep and coin were both found. The stories of finding them were shared, and there was great rejoicing all around.

But perhaps we are to consider what it might have been like if the sheep had not been located, alive and well. And what if the woman had not found the coin? Thus a substantial proportion of her life savings was lost to her?

What about loss without the happy ending? Or what about the sense of loss after finding that a valued object, or person, or relationship, or idea, is missing, or perhaps destroyed? What if it were one's home, destroyed by natural calamity or military action? What if it were one's family, killed or abducted or simply missing?

What about loss of one's sense of safety and security in one's country?

Have you ever been lost? I mean well and truly lost?

Where you didn't know how to find your way back to a familiar place?

Well, I have been lost. Many times! I call it navigational impairment. I have been lost out on the highways in five states. I have been lost even in hospitals where I was working!

Somehow, full daylight, a detailed map and a cell phone never seem to help. I have a real gift for getting lost in a serious way.

Have you ever lost something? Not necessarily a sheep or a silver coin, but perhaps something that meant a great deal to you? A cell phone? Your keys? Your self confidence? A friend?

Feels awful, doesn't it? Especially when you desperately need what you have lost or misplaced!

I have lost several things that meant a great deal to me, and was never able to retrieve them. Among these, the hardest to bear were the loss of friends, intimate partners, classmates, family members.

The thing that was the worst, however, was when, as a child, I lost my trust in God.

Now, that was a long time ago. And it took me several decades to recover that trust. I must confess, I don't think that I, personally, can take credit for regaining that trust.

I truly believe that the Holy Spirit had a tremendous amount of effort invested in me, and was not going to give up until her mission was accomplished. And accomplish it she did! So now I do have my full trust in God and God's grace; and I believe that I have the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus.

What a relief!

So what we have is a lesson in using the lens of loss to focus on where we are, what we have, what seems certain, and what may no longer seem certain. But this is just our first lesson in using this lens! What are we supposed to do with it?

I told you several minutes ago that I chose to speak today about the Gospel lesson in Luke Chapter 15.

I believe that the Holy Spirit, in her great wisdom, decided that the lesson from the Hebrew Bible must be part of this, my very first sermon!

[I feel I must share with you: a straightforward sermon about the lost sheep and lost coin, sounded like it might be possible for me, a complete novice, to talk about.

A passage from Jeremiah seems to me more along the lines of a post-doctoral fellowship in Hebrew Bible — WAY over my head! This is what happens when one puts one's trust in the Holy Spirit.]

[Read here Jer 4: 23-28:](#)

23 I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.

24 I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.

25 I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled.

26 I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.

27 For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.

28 Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back.

Jeremiah is relaying to the people of Israel that YHWH is beyond anger, beyond grief. YHWH's words tell of disaster and cataclysm to come. I cannot fully interpret today the partial verses that are designated. There is a tremendous amount to say, and much that has been said, about Jeremiah's messages from a grieving, angry, heartbroken, YHWH.

I would like for us to simply focus on the facet of this story, that YHWH had felt the loss of love and trust from YHWH's people, the people of Israel, once again.

YHWH and the people of Israel had a long and checkered relationship. YHWH would forgive and make new covenants and see them broken and forgotten over and over by the group of people whom YHWH loved. And yet, no matter how many times Israel would betray the relationship, YHWH took them back.

This time, however, YHWH is beyond anger, beyond hurt. The consequences will be dire.

There is much more to the story but I am going to leave it at that.

We are standing beside Jeremiah as he describes the devastation to come. The earth will become desolate and the people of Israel taken into captivity.

Jeremiah's words impart to me a feeling of deepest dread. I see what might become of the entire earth. I see what might become of the people who live on earth.

I do believe that we have a responsibility to take care of the marvelous gifts that God has given us. God expects us to care for the earth and for each other.

I do believe that God expects us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, strength; and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

God has given us an abundance: we have more than enough to feed, clothe, shelter, and keep healthy every single adult and child in the world today. But are we using these resources in a responsible manner? Are we loving our neighbors as we love ourselves?

Are we nurturing our relationship with God?

God does not "lose" us.

God is always with us.

God does not abandon us.

But what if we "lose" or abandon God?

God is always forgiving.

God made a covenant of grace with us when Jesus gave Himself.

It is up to us to remember and to practice the life Jesus asks us to live.

It is up to each of us to remember that God has placed every needful thing on earth in abundance so that we may share with every person.

God expects us to not “lose” other folks, whether to government intervention or starvation or lack of medical assistance or any other dreadful human-driven action.

God expects us to care for every single person on this earth no matter where or who they are, no matter what political party each belongs to, no matter what each needs.

We are each and every one of us loved and cherished by God.

Jesus said: “I give you a new commandment. Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you must love each other.”
Amen