



LESSONS for LIFE

MARCH 29, 2009 7:00 p.m
8 LIFE CHANGING MESSAGES FROM JESUS
FROM LOST TO FOUND
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This morning when Brent introduced the sermon he found he got inspired a little late – as in seven o'clock this morning – on his sermon he was to deliver two hours later and he said that he was going to take it up with God later on because God wasn't doing his part of the bargain; and I thought to myself as I was sitting up in the balcony, well, if God inspired Brent the way he inspired me then I was going to have something to take up with God too, because we had the same sermon topic and we're just, hopefully, taking two different bents on it.

I'm going to read for you the story of the lost son, also called the story of the prodigal son and this is from *The Message*, which is a paraphrased version of the New Testament. This is a story which Jesus told in Luke 15:

Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.'
"So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corn cobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father and I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God. I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand. He got right up and went home to his father.

When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick, bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here – given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time."

You know, there was a man once who had lost his wallet. He searched for it but he couldn't find it anywhere. He wondered if it was the early onset of AAADD which is age activated attention deficit disorder, but it just couldn't be found anywhere. Then, after he'd been searching for two days he got a call from the local police department and they said, "Your wallet's been found. Would you please come



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down and pick it up.” When he arrived at the station he was shocked as the police officers grabbed him by the arm, slapped handcuffs on him and led him off to a cell. This is a true story, by the way. You see, he had left his wallet at the gas station two days before. As he was paying for the gas he decided to hold up the gas station attendant for the \$200. in the till. As he left with the two hundred dollars he forgot he’d left his wallet on the counter. In the end they actually charged him with many things, one of which was driving without a licence! We all lose things all the time. I think it’s regardless of whether you run around the house searching for keys which have been in your hand all the time, or maybe you’ve searched high and low for that piece of paper with phone numbers written on it that you really needed, and of course, there’s the time when we’d put that item on the spot – I’ll put it here so I don’t forget it – spot, only to forget where that spot was, right? The truth is, even though objects are lost it doesn’t change the nature of that item. The object is still the same; it’s still just as cherished; it still looks and is the same. Objects become lost only because people look where they are not instead of where they are.

When Jesus happened to talk about being lost in Luke chapter 15, as I read to you, he actually gives three stories of things that are lost: a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. The third one is particularly interesting because it’s a person who, because of his own decisions, becomes lost; but he quickly finds out when he goes home that he too is still the same person. He’s still just as cherished by those he loves and we, like him, can realize that we are lost only because we are looking where we are not instead of looking where we are. We are lost because we are looking where we are not instead of looking where we are. It seems to me there are three different ways of feeling lost; each becomes interconnected and each can ultimately be fixed by changing our outlook on our circumstances by looking where we are. The most obvious of these is the sense of lost that we feel because of our community, or lack thereof. We don’t look at our own situations. We look at the communities of others and usually find that the grass seems a little bit greener on the other side whether our communities are our families or a network of co-workers or friends or acquaintances. We often become disillusioned by the communities we are in. We may feel isolated. We can feel a great deal of aloneness; we can feel lost. That son who left his family in search of something else was probably doing a little community searching himself. Communities and families change; they’re made up of people after all. People move, feelings change and circumstances change. It’s understandable how we can sometimes feel tossed about. Even in a community we may have one spot that is stable but our survival through it all is going to depend on how deep our personal roots are in our community. It’s like the trees of the inner Alaskan passage. The trees face the stunning amounts of rain and snow, winds of up to one hundred miles per hour, yet the soil they are in is usually about two to six inches deep. How do these trees stand in these kind of conditions? They stand because their roots are intertwined with each other; because they are connected deeply to their community; they don’t stand alone.

How deep are your roots in your community? It takes some looking where you are to find your community. The second way in which we can feel lost is even more deeply felt at times – like that son in the story who demanded his inheritance and then left to find himself. We often are left without a sense of purpose or reason for being in this world. Really, this is a life-long struggle. I know myself that after I was “outed” in the Baptist church in which I’d been a Pastor – forced to leave in disgrace and banned from a career that I had trained for since my late teens – I felt a huge sense of loss and a sense of being lost. Not only had I lost the community that I had felt grounded in but I didn’t know what my purpose was then to be. I’d be lying if I told you that my years as a Pastor sometimes feel like a waste. Now that I’m teaching and feeling a new sense of purpose in that area I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if I had not been a closeted Pastor for eight years. But that ‘what if?’ game is



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another example of looking where we are not instead of looking where we are. We can't dwell on the past or worry so much about the future that we fail to see we have a purpose of where we are now.

I could share some cheesy platitude about right now being a gift and right now that's why it's called the present but the truth is the present is all we have to work with. For most people our sense of purpose over time changes – like the communities we are in. Sometimes those changes can be drastic; sometimes they can be a little more subtle but no change negates the experiences, accomplishments and even failures of our past. We must look where we are now, connect ourselves deeply to our community, learn from our past and work in the now. Sometimes it may feel like putting together a two thousand piece jig-saw puzzle without the box as a framework of a picture to look at but the more you work at it the more clear over time your sense of purpose becomes. It takes some looking where you are to find that sense of purpose.

The final type of search that people look for is perhaps the deepest and sometimes most ill defined feeling of lost. It's an intensely personal and very evasive search. An incredible number of people feel this sense of lost without realizing it and many without even acknowledging it. The inner spiritual search for the existence of a greater power is a lifelong thirst search for a feeling of connectedness. I also know that after I was outed and feeling very much hurt by the church I went through a time of wanting to believe there was no God, but eventually and gradually I was compelled to realize that while he or she may not be as strictly defined as I was originally raised to believe the existence of a greater power was increasingly clear to me. And so, again, or perhaps not again but all along, I continued on my journey in a search of being connected to God in hopes that I could be found in that ground of being.

One big difference between this search and the two that I mentioned previously is that our communities and senses of purpose change; but while our understanding of God may change, God does not change. Like the father or mother who welcomes a child home after perhaps a long and painful journey away we are still welcomed; we are still loved; we are still accepted by God, regardless of what we've done or who we are. We often fail in our search for God because we look for that presence in our lives where we are not instead of where we are, but you don't have to look very far. The experience of God happens all around us and within us. We can look where we are and experience God and feel like we have found something special and have been found ourselves. Sometimes we even replace this search for God in our lives with a search for community or search for a sense of purpose, hoping that will give us a sense of being found that we seek, but I challenge you to place a priority on doing the inner God deep search for understanding and as a more clear picture of who you are in God comes to light you can then become more clear on your sense of purpose and ultimately be connected to a community.

To go from feeling lost to being found truly is a lifelong journey with its share of setbacks and successes, but as you seek to discover who you are and your role in this world you can be sure that you don't have to do it alone. Many of us are here because we seek to do the same thing and there's nothing better on a long journey to have some company along the way. I encourage you to see perhaps if this is a place, a community where you could spread your roots as we become more and more found together.



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I'm going to ask the singing group to come forward now and as they come forward I want you to be thinking of this song that we're about to sing together. This song is really a prayer. It's a prayer talking about what's really most important and it places that importance on the inner God deep search and it says that the truths of love that Jesus taught – those are the priorities: being free, being accepted, being loved.

*When the music fades, all is swept away,
And I simply come:
Longing just to bring, something that's of worth, that will bless your heart.*

*I'll bring you more than a song,
For a song in itself
Is not what you have required.*

You search much deeper within, You're looking into my heart.

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Amen.