

Sermon Proper 19

Year C

[RCL] Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28; Psalm 14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Will you seek God today?

The quote “What you seek is seeking you,” made popular by a 13th-century Sufi mystic and theologian, holds true in our relationship with our Creator God. There is something in all of us that innately seeks out our Creator, just as the Creator seeks us. Since the beginning of time God has revealed God-self as One who is seeking communion with God’s children.

In the creation story in the garden of Eden we read about God walking beneath the trees seeking out Adam. “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day... Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ (Gen 3:8-9). It’s hard to believe that an all-knowing God did not know where Adam was to be found. But in God’s searching and seeking, in asking “where are you?” it had nothing to do with the physical location, but perhaps more of Adam’s spiritual location.

In this creation story and all throughout scripture we find God seeking man. Luke 15:1-10 teaches us about the joy God gets, when what God seeks is found.

In the parable of the lost sheep the tendencies of sheep to wander off to “greener grass” leads to its separation from the flock and its shepherd. As it is with humans we stray and wander away from our Creator’s guidance and direction thinking we can do it on our own or that it’s by our own strength and wisdom we are able to navigate this journey.

The story is told about sheep in the Highlands of Scotland and how they often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they cannot get out of, just to get to sweeter grass. But in jumping down ten or twelve feet for sweet grass they were unable to jump back up. After a couple days and eating all the grass, the shepherd would hear them bleating in distress and in those moments of distressed bleating the sheep is seeking the shepherd. The shepherd knowing it’s sheep the best, will wait until each animal was faint before pulling them out.

The story continues, proving that the shepherd is being strategic in the saving the sheep because if the sheep aren’t faint the likelihood of them jolting over the

precipice when the attempt to save them is made, causing them to jumping to their death is extremely high.

Perhaps some believe God deals with them in a similar fashion, waiting until we are faint, down, and out before intervening. Like the good shepherd however, God is always strategic in God's seeking of us and God is always working in our best interest.

The shepherd knows that if the sheep are separated from the flock and the shepherd both parties aren't whole and can't operate as they are meant too. As it is when we are separated from right relationship with God, we aren't operating in our true, full purpose. That is why God seeks us to be in right relationship and delights in restoration. This seeking is not just for the lost, but for every child of God wherever we find ourselves.

All over scripture we read of God seeking God's children. In John 4:23, God is seeking "true worshipers that will worship God in spirit and truth." In Psalm 14:2, the psalmist pens that "The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God." And 2 Chr 16:9 says likewise "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him." And in the gospel from Luke 15 we find God giving us a clear view into God's heart and God's intentions by comparing God-self with a shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to seek the one lost (Luke 15:4-7), and with a woman combing through her entire house on the search for a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10).

Throughout Scripture we encounter a God who is on a mission, a seeking God, seeking God's children. A God who is all powerful, omnipresent, and self-reliant. A God who knows all and sees all. A God who parts water and who's voice the wind obeys, that same God seeks us all, and rejoices when we are found in God. Because we are precious and prized and the One who created us, sees us as rare and our value countless.

And the seeking goes both ways. "What you seek, seeks you." Just as the sheep seeks the shepherd for help, and the coin reflects the light waiting to be found, something innately in us wants to be found by our Creator God to the point where we cry out like David to "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Ps 51:11). A right spirit to be in right relationship with God.

In Psalm 51 David is honest and upfront about his wrong doings. He realizes that they separate him from God, and accepts full responsibility "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned,

and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.” David sets a great example for us to mirror. An example that shows us that repentance is the first step to restoring and renewing our relationship with God “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.” David is appealing to the essence of God’s character. He’s appealing to God’s steadfast love and abundant mercy, rather than what he thinks he deserves or earned.

In Psalm 51 David models how we too can pray when we are seeking God’s cleansing and forgiveness from our transgressions, iniquities, and sins. Our sins separate us from God, but when we confess them, God is gracious and forgives us.

So no matter how far we wander away from God. No matter how far we fall. God still loves us, pursues us and seeks us. Hebrews 13 reminds us that God has promised to never leave us, nor forsake us.

God has made this evident is sacrificing Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins and sending us the Comforter – the Holy Spirit.

God never gives up on us. God never lets go of us. God is seeking us daily.

Will you seek God today?

Amen

Written by the Rev. Arlette Benoit. Benoit is a graduate of General Theological Seminary in New York City where she earned her Masters in Divinity with a Certificate in Spiritual Direction. Benoit was ordained to the priesthood in June 2013 in the Diocese of Atlanta. While at seminary Benoit interned with The Episcopal Church’s Office of Black Ministries. She continues to be involved with the Office of Black Ministries, and assist and provides consultation for the planning of the S.O.U.L (Spiritual Opportunity to Unity and Learn) Conferences for youth and young adults, in addition to working with a team of clergy and lay leaders to develop The Rising Stars (RISE) Experience -- a new initiative aimed at countering the “School-to-Prison Pipeline,” where children are pushed out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Benoit was also recently appointed to serve as a Youth Ministry Liaison for the Office of Youth Ministries representing Province Four of The Episcopal Church. She has also served as seminarian at Trinity Wall Street and St. Ann’s Church for the Deaf during her time in New York City. Benoit now serves at St. Paul’s Episcopal Atlanta GA, as Associate to the Rector.

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