



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

January 6, 2013

"A Life Lost That Has Been Found" (Gospel of Luke Series)

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This is the first of a three-part sermon series that I will be giving you today and the next two Sundays. This sermon series is all about lost things and lost people.

Today is also my traditional State of the Church Address where I point us toward the direction that I believe God is calling us to take in 2013.

But first, we begin with a parable about a lost sheep, which is a baaaaad thing, and a parable about a lost coin. Ka-ching! Then the next two Sundays will be about two lost prodigal sons. The underlining theme for all three sermons is about a God who seeks us out because of love.

Let's begin with today's passage.

Luke 15:1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus] him.

Luke 15:2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:3 So he told them this parable:

Luke 15:4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"

Luke 15:5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

Luke 15:6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

Luke 15:7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Luke 15:8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?"

Luke 15:9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

Luke 15:10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let me share the context behind the lost sheep and the lost coin.

First-century shepherds had many challenges in keeping their sheep safe. Ancient Judea was mostly dry and arid, so pastures were scarce. There was the danger of high cliffs, too. The central plateau was only a few miles wide, and it ended with a sheer drop,

from ragged cliffs to the devastation of the wilderness.

Sheep are not known for being wise, and they would often wander off, which gets them into trouble—they get caught in brush, fall off a cliff, or become dinner of ravenous wild animals.

Shepherds had a demanding job. If they were to lose a sheep, their pay would be docked for the price of that animal. Hence, shepherds would always be counting their sheep. Losing sheep meant humiliation for the shepherd.

It was typical to have a flock of 100 sheep. It would not be unusual either for a flock to have a trinity of shepherds watching them.

A flock of sheep often belonged to a whole village rather than to one person. Therefore, if a shepherd were still out searching for lost sheep, the whole community would set up a watch to make sure he came home with the sheep safely over his shoulders.

While sheep get lost because they are not very smart, coins get lost because their owners have gotten careless.

Let me tell you about the lost coin that Jesus is talking about. Instead of a wedding ring, a newly married Jewish girl wore a headband embellished with ten silver coins to show her new marital status.

The coins are valuable because they could represent a woman's life savings. They also have tremendous sentimental value. Hence, to lose one of these coins would be devastating to the woman.

Imagine the woman's fear and anxiety when she counts her ten coins and realizes in horror that one is missing! She goes into high gear to search her house.

Remember there was no electricity back then--just oil lamps. So this poor woman is frantically sweeping her entire house with limited lighting and looking everywhere for that lost coin.

Back then, houses normally had only one window so it was dark. The flooring was often dry earth covered with dry reeds so finding a coin is like looking for a needle in a haystack!

I know that horrible frantic feeling. When a famous band came here to Honolulu a few years ago to do a concert at the Aloha Stadium, a friend was gracious enough to get me tickets to the show. My friend even said that it might be possible for me to meet the band after the concert!

The possibility of my meeting the band actually never happened because the band went to a private VIP party with Bill Gates on the USS Missouri instead. What a bummer!

Bill Gates obviously didn't hear my December sermons where Jesus said we are supposed to go to the highways and byways and invite the nobodies to our parties, and not the somebodies. We're supposed to invite those who couldn't possibly pay us back.

Anyway, so I was given eight tickets—can you believe it—and no one wanted to go with me! So like Jesus said, I went to the highways and byways and invited those who could never afford such a treat. Ah, but I digress. Back to my story.

So I put the concert tickets carefully in a tin box that had my other precious things. A few days before the concert, I looked into the tin box to check on those tickets because a lot of people were depending on me for this concert.

But to my horror, the tickets were gone! I couldn't believe it. Had I taken them out to check the seat numbers and then forgot to put them back? Did I take them out to make sure I had 8? Where were they?

I looked in the tin box again and went through all of the other papers in there, but no tickets. I searched the room. I checked my wallet. I checked the bedrooms, bathrooms, dining room, and my home office. I searched the whole house. Nothing! Where did I put those tickets? I spent hours looking!

I went back to the box and lifted the cover and went through everything again. Maybe they got stuck in between papers? Maybe they got stuck next to an envelope? Nothing!

Now it was the day before the concert, and still no tickets! I went to look in the tin box one more time, and lo and behold, there were the tickets!

What had happened was that the envelope with the tickets had gotten stuck on the inside of the box cover. There was an edge, an overlap, and somehow the edge of the envelope got stuck in the inside edge of the box cover, so every time I lifted the cover and put the cover down to look for the

tickets, the envelope went up with the cover so I couldn't see it.

What a relief! I yelled, "Hallelujah! Praise God!" Those that were lost were now found!

In Jesus' parable, the woman celebrated, too, when she found what she lost. Jesus said:

Luke 15:9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

Luke 15:10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The whole point of these parables is this: people are like the lost sheep and the lost coin. We are of incredible value to God.

The shepherd and the woman represent God. The joy they felt is like what the Lord feels when He suddenly finds a person lost in the world's values. God is ecstatic! The angels celebrate and sing!

And here is the amazing thing about Jesus, the Son of God, who came to us in human form on Christmas Day. Jesus says to each person on this earth: allow yourself be found by God. Know that God wants to dine with you, hang out with you here on earth and in the eternal banquet in heaven.

Hear this and check if this is not right: there is no other major world religion that teaches about a God who seeks out lost people because He loves them so much.

Other religions talk about what we need to do to reach God, and they say it's through good works.

Christianity, on the other hand, is the only one that says it's God who reaches out and seeks us out to extend His grace, mercy, and love, if we would but listen to Him, for God knows we were designed to be with Him. But if we choose to live a life without God, or a life that keeps God distant, or a life that just dabbles in God as if He were a hobby, then we will remain lost by our own choosing.

Hence, the gut check as we start 2013 is two-fold. First, do we see ourselves as lost?

It's easy to be prideful and to have thoughts like, "How dare you say that I am lost! I am anything but lost. I am accomplished. I am educated. I am sophisticated. I am smart. I am law-abiding. I give to charity. Who needs God?"

The irony is that it is only when we can see ourselves as truly lost without God that we will be found by God and experience the incredible life He offers. But if we think we are not lost, then we are actually lost.

What does it mean to be lost? I like what Bible commentator J. Norval Geldenhuys says (p.403 in his Gospel of Luke commentary). **He says to be lost means:**

1) To be out of place

Sheep belong in a flock, coins belong on a headband, and lost sinners belong in fellowship with God. To be in this world without God as Lord is really to be out of place on earth.

2) To be out of service

A lost sheep has no value to the shepherd, and a lost coin has no value to the owner. Lost sinners cannot experience the fulfillment God has for them in Jesus Christ.

3) To be found

This happens when we finally invite God to be at the core of our lives. With Jesus as our Shepherd, we will be kept safe, we will have a purposeful life, we will discover our true destiny, the blueprint of our lives, and the pathways He wants us to take as we follow Him daily.

We have fulfillment and joy finally. This does not mean no pain; life always has pain. But rather, in spite of the pain, we still have the strength to move on and the reassurance that God is with us through it all.

It is incredibly important for us to realize on a daily basis these two foundational principles in this State of the Church Address:

A. We must realize on a daily basis that we are lost without God.

It takes humility to realize and declare that. Humility is one of the core values of our church that we strive to have. Basically, admitting that we are lost without God means we need all the help we can get from Him in this confusing, difficult, and painful world. We don't have enough wisdom on our own.

We need to admit that without God, we are powerless to make the changes we need to make in our lives. Left to our own, we really don't have the best direction for our lives.

B. Our purpose in life is to help other lost people find God.

This moves us from being self-centered and regarding God as an ATM of blessings, to a life of service for others. It was never meant to be all about us. Our purpose is to help others be found by God.

So how do we do that? At the very core of First Prez, the very DNA of each person in our church community, should be the following:

D = Discipleship
N = Nutrition
A = Alpha Course

May this DNA be at the forefront of our minds for 2013 and beyond. This is what I believe each and every member and regular attendee should strive for.

Let me break down this DNA letter by letter. May it all be something that is easy for us to remember and repeat.

1) D = Discipleship

Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus' last words are for us to make disciples. He is not just interested in believers. He is interested in disciples —people who are truly committed to following God and living out a life of passion and dedication to Him.

During a couple of our worship services last month, we heard from some church members who served in our Armed forces. We learned how Matt Weaver served four deployments in the last five years — that's 28 months out of 60 months away from his wife and children. That's tremendous sacrifice on their part for our sake.

We also heard from Jerry Coffee, and we were reminded of how he was tortured and imprisoned as a POW. Another tremendous sacrifice for our sake.

We have our part to do as followers of Christ. Remember that we are in a spiritual war everyday, a spiritual war launched by a demon named Lucifer, who has been and continues to wreak havoc in our lives. He has been doing that to all people for centuries with thousands of other demons on his side. None of us are exempt from his evil affects; none of us, not even our loved ones.

We need to stand strong. People need our help in Jesus' name. We need disciples—fully dedicated and impassioned people—who will go all out for Jesus to help those in need and to stand strong in the face of evil

From the beginning of the Church, believers suffered, sacrificed, and gave up many things, including their lives so that 2,000 years later, we may know about Jesus, whom they were committed to follow until the very end. Shame on us if we break the chain of faith and the commitment to help others after all of these thousands of years.

Christianity is not a hobby. Don't ever speak of it like that. It's a daily, 24/7 way of life; the kind of life God wants us to have.

Jesus said disciples must be taught about everything He has commanded. Being a disciple means being serious about reading the Bible to learn how to put Him first in all areas of our lives. Study the Bible. Go to Sunday morning Life Training classes. Take classes at WAKO (Wednesdays at Ko'olau). Some of the best teachers and communicators on the island have been recruited just for us.

If you're a junior higher or a high schooler, go to Youth Group, summer camps, and retreats. If you're a parent, send your kids to Sunday School. It may be the only place where they will learn the Bible at a young age.

Christ believers at First Prez have to know that our own discipleship has to be a priority. Without reading and studying the Bible, we will not, we will NOT be able to cope in healthy ways with all the temptations, the problems, the pressures, and heartaches in our sinful world.

We have to be serious about worshipping God on Sundays. We have to be serious about the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be close to God.

2) N = Nutrition

1 Cor 6:18-19 "For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Part of the First Prez DNA is taking better care of God's temple, meaning our physical bodies. We will be more health conscious. We need to be better in what we eat, how we eat, how we rest, how we exercise. And maybe for some of us, that means to start exercising. Ko'olau Kitchen continues to give us vegetarian options in its weekly menu.

This year I hope to offer some weeknight teachings on nutrition to emphasize the importance of eating more vegetables and fruits, and the need to watch our cholesterol and fat intake.

But let me take nutrition a bit further. We're aiming not just for good physical nutrition but for good spiritual nutrition as well. It means accepting even more seriously that healing prayer works and that it is for real.

Healing prayer will be part of our default understanding of how the Holy Spirit promotes wellness in our lives. That miracles—physical, emotional, or spiritual—can happen through prayer.

Also part of wellness is learning certain life skills, like how to forgive and how to receive forgiveness, how to handle anger, how to handle money, and how to listen. They're all part of a healthy life.

3) A = Alpha Course

Now I understand that "Alpha" is the name of a program in our church. But hey, I was trying for a D-N-A acronym, and D-N-E, with E for evangelism, just doesn't work. So "A" stands for Alpha, with Alpha representing evangelism. This is the part where we help other lost souls find Jesus Christ.

The Alpha Course is a ten-week course that I would like every member and every regular attendee to take this year, if not the next. We have daytime Alpha and nighttime Alpha courses. It is a primary way for people to understand, in a non-threatening way, the basics of Christianity and God, who seeks us out and loves us.

Evangelism is a First Prez core value, too. We are to lead others to Christ. We are to help the lost find God. We do this over table conversations. We do this by inviting people to Alpha, to a Sunday morning worship service, or to a Christmas or Easter service, as many of you already do.

In fact, you have done such a good job of inviting others that our Christmas Eve services last week were the most highly attended in the 53-year history of First Prez! More than 3,7000 people attended our six services. That's a staggering number! Great job in inviting people to church!

What kind of inviting spirit is part of our DNA. That desire to invite others to church is the same DNA in us that wants to serve others locally and abroad, whether it's work day here at the church to help clean up the grounds, or helping with youth and children's ministries, or through our Impact Ministries - flying to Thailand, Swaziland, Bangladesh or the Philippines to minister to those in need. All of us should serve in a regular way in Christ's name. It's part of our DNA.

But what drives our passion to do all of this? It shouldn't be guilt. It shouldn't be obligation. What drives us is that we know in our hearts that all of us were once lost and now we have been found; that we have experienced Jesus Christ, our shepherd, finding us, helping us, guiding us, and forgiving us.

Today is Communion Sunday—a perfect way to kick off the new year. Communion reminds us that once we were lost but now we are found. Because of sin, we got separated from God and got lost. We would have been plagued for eternity with this separation had it not been for Jesus.

He came to earth, suffered, and died on a cross to take on all of our sin and pay the penalty for them. We, the lost sheep, have been found! What kind of God is this, who seeks us out, loves us, teaches us, forgives us, and dies for us? There is no other God like this. In fact, there is no other God.

When we come to communion, we realize that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son Jesus to die for us so we can be saved from being eternally separated from Him.

So as we come to communion may we have in us the DNA to follow Him as a fully committed follower of Christ knowing that we were once lost

but now am found. Amen? Amen! Let's pray.

Lord, it's a new year, a new beginning. May we fully realize the DNA in our hearts to be faithful disciple, to live a healthy life in body and soul, to reach out to others through evangelism. For some of us today, taking this Communion might be their first step of faith in a long, long time. May they do it and affirm that Jesus is Lord. Amen.

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