

McCabe United Methodist Church

February 11, 2018

Puzzling Relationships Series: The Lost...Our Missing Puzzle Pieces

Sermon on Luke 15:1-7

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Good Morning Church!

I wonder if you've had the chance to encounter the power and the presence of the Living, Active Spirit during worship yet today?

Let's pray,

Mighty and Merciful God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts this morning be acceptable in your sight. Draw us close and speak to us this morning. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

Six weeks ago, we started this series on Puzzling Relationships. We started with the foundation. We started with what Jesus called The Greatest Commandment. There's nothing more important than loving God and loving neighbor.

Over the following weeks we've wrestled with what it means to love God and to love neighbor when our neighbor is an enemy or a family member. We've wrestled with the idea of loving God and neighbor as it relates to gossip and strained relationships.

This morning we wrestle with this idea of loving God and loving neighbor as it relates to people who aren't here, for whatever reason. Maybe they've left the church, or felt hurt by the church, or maybe they feel the church has nothing to offer them.

I was visiting with a friend a few weeks ago and we were talking about puzzles. Have you ever 'finished' a puzzle, well, almost finished a puzzle? I say almost finished a puzzle because there's a piece or two missing.

As I look out across the sanctuary this morning, we have a beautiful picture emerging here, a beautiful picture coming into focus, but there are pieces missing, and without these pieces, the picture isn't complete.

Did you know that in my grandparent's generation, 90% of their generation were in church every weekend? For my parent's generation, 70% of their generation were, or are, in church every weekend. For my generation, it's down to 50%, and for many in my generation, regular church attendance has moved to once a month, or even once every 6 weeks. What do you think about that?

Over the past couple of weekends, we have had 7 people join McCabe. As we wrestle with what it means to join McCabe, we talk about *prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness*. We talk about *presence* as being in Church at least 3 times a month unless

you're sick or travelling. This is a commitment that helps us grow personally. But our *presence* also helps others. Our *presence* supports and encourages others in their faith too.

Back to the generational data...50% of my generation considers themselves to be part of the Body of Christ. That's consistent with data gathered over the last 20 years. George Barna reports that 40% of the people in the US, 40%...identify as post Christian. They consider themselves to be completely secular. How do you feel about that?

It is more and more likely that the people we encounter, that the people we meet have NEVER set foot in a church. Not even for a funeral or wedding. Think about that for a minute.

Let's keep going... For my kid's generation, the kids currently in school, 30% are affiliated or somehow engaged with the church. 30%. 3 out of 10. And my potential grandkid's generation...unless we start to figure this out, 10% will be engaged with a Body of Christ. That means 90%...9 out of 10 people, will NOT know Jesus unless we do something different. 90%. Are you okay with that? That makes my heart skip a beat.

And do you know how people meet Jesus? Do you know how people start to build a relationship with a church? It's through regular people, like you and me. It happens by building relationships over time. It happens by offering gentle invitations. It happens by living our faith in a way that makes people stop and pause and say: I want that too.

Throughout history God has worked through ordinary people to change the world and through ordinary people He has built the church.

Now the religious folks didn't always like Jesus' approach. He made them uncomfortable. He challenged them to LIVE their Faith. He challenged them to enter into areas where it might get uncomfortable or messy. Jesus encouraged the people to not just talk about their faith or hide behind the rules, Jesus said, you know what...if you're going live your faith, if you're going live the message, it's not going to be a cakewalk. In fact, if you want to live your faith then you're going have to take up your cross. You're going have to go beyond your comfort zone and then you can begin to follow me.

Hear, again how it sounds in this morning's Scripture from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15 (NLT). It's titled the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Our Scripture begins...

15 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ²This made the Pharisees and (the) teachers of religious law complain that (Jesus) he was associating with such sinful people — (He was) even (sharing a meal... He was even) eating with them!

³ So Jesus told them (Jesus told the Pharisees...the religious folks) this story:

⁴ “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?

⁵ And when he has found (a lost sheep) it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.

⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’

⁷ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

There is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who (comes home... who) repents and returns to God...than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away.

We’re talking about finding the missing pieces. This isn’t about us. This is about something bigger than ourselves. This is about helping people meet Jesus. This is about worship and ministry and relationships, however puzzling, that have the potential to change lives for the greater good. And our best celebrations happen every time someone finds their way home.

What if we heard our Scripture this way: “If a (church) has a hundred (parishioners) and one of them gets lost, what will (the church) do? Won’t (the people of the church) leave (each other? Wouldn’t they leave) the ninety-nine others (together in the building) and go (searching? Won’t they go) searching for the (person who’s not here? The) one who is lost until he finds his way home?

And when (someone who’s fallen away or not had the chance to be part of the Body of Christ, when they’ve been) found, (The people of the church) will joyfully (show them the way. The church will long to build a relationship with them, and gently support them, doing what they need to do, so they can find their way home).

And when they arrive, the Church notices. The Church welcomes and makes room. The church celebrates, even if things change a little bit, even if a new person disrupts the existing patterns. The church CELEBRATES and makes room even though someone else has been here longer, even though someone else has always had a certain role. The church celebrates every time someone new finds their way Home!

We were in the back yard one day. Berk, our son and I were working and playing out back. Berk was maybe three years old. He was busy digging and working in the garden. We had a tiny backyard. The garage took up a big chunk of the backyard.

I had dashed into the garage, grabbed a shovel and got back outside to find Berk was gone. I was in the garage for less than a minute! I had no idea where he was!

I ran around to the front of the house. We lived on a pretty busy street. Nothing... I couldn't see him in the alley. I checked with Brenda. She hadn't seen him, but now she's looking too. I honestly don't know how long it was... 5 minutes, 10 minutes, maybe longer, I don't know. We eventually found him a couple backyards up the street. The neighbors had a new puppy, and he'd gone up the street to see how things were going and to check the puppy out.

Have you ever lost something, or have you ever been missing something so badly, that it shakes you to the core?

That's what Jesus is talking about in today's Scripture. It should shake us to the core that there are people missing here. There are friends and family who aren't here. There are people we've never met, and who haven't YET met Jesus.

Friends, I believe God has placed us right here, right now, not for our own comfort, and not to celebrate ourselves. I believe God has placed us right here, right now, so we have a staging area, a mission outpost to base our ministry and missions out of to love God and neighbor. A place to reach the neighborhood and the community, and to celebrate every time someone new finds a home through McCabe.

Did you see that Emergency Alert in Hawaii a few weeks ago? Let's say you're in Hawaii and this alert starts blowing up all the phones around you. Incoming ballistic missile attack imminent. Take shelter immediately. This is not a drill. Holy smokes! That would get your heart pumping.

A few weeks ago, we had the first Blue Alert sent out in our area. An intentional attempt had been made to harm a law enforcement officer in our area. The alert notified: The suspect is at large.

Two evenings ago, there were banners running across our screens with severe wind chill warnings. Other times it might be an Amber Alert. Push notifications come to our phones... Those big signs by the highways are lit up... an urgent bulletin. Someone's missing! Be on the look-out. Descriptions of the child and the suspect are given. The goal is to galvanize the entire community, to assist in the search and the safe return of the child.

Friends, look around you. There are people missing here this morning. Look around... Who's here? Who's missing? Who isn't here or has never been here?

According to this morning's Scripture, this is a 9-1-1 emergency. These are life and death decisions, with eternal implications.

This isn't about us. This isn't about the survival of the church. The church will continue. God will find ways to raise up remnants and make new starts. God will continue to breathe life into the world. We just have to decide if God will do this with or without us.

This is about our friends and neighbors. This is about our kids and grandkids. This is about salvation.

What if everybody, over Lent and the next 6 months made an extra effort to connect or reconnect with one person who's missing? One missing sheep so they might have the invitation, and the chance, to come home.

Friends people are missing. The Amber Alert is blaring. Together, and individually, how are we going to respond?

Let's pray...

God of compassion and God of courage, let our faith be foundational and unreserved. Penetrate our thoughts and our vision. Help us to give thanks for those among us, and lead us to connecting and reconnecting with those who aren't here. This morning we surrender ourselves to you so we may be faithful witnesses and servants wherever you place us. We pray in the powerful name of our Savior, The Good Shepherd. Amen.