

September 11, 2016



"DISCIPLE: Pass It On"

Fall Sanctuary Worship Sermon Series – No. 2

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "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? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 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.' 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. "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? 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.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

What a fun day at church! There's so much going on today—a barbeque, games, crafts for kids, a bounce house, snow cones, getting our new directories signed, new art in the Fireside Room, the blessing of our fabulous new pop-up community library! Whew!

And it's not just today. If you've looked at the Order of Worship insert and at the September Sentinel newsletter, you'll see that there's lots going on nearly every day of every week: Messy Church kicked off yesterday, simple church goes weekly starting tonight. We've got new classes---Covenant Bible Study, Financial Peace University, the Book Studies, new theater productions by CAST and ACT, the Habitat build, Sacred Yoga, Chancel Choir rehearsals have resumed, Children's Church, UMYF Fall kick-off tonight. And then there are all the ways we open up our space to the community—Scouts, the Santa Monica Quilt Guild, our Flu Shot Clinic and Blood Drive, being a polling place on election day-- etc. etc. etc. Forgive me if I left out your favorite thing.

Every time our wonderful Communications Director, Tina Gage, compiles all this in a photo montage for the Sentinel, I'm almost overwhelmed. I know about it all—usually—but when I see it all pulled together, I'm still stunned to see how much is happening.

I was feeling pretty good about it all this week, giving us all a big collective pat on the back for all our hard work, and then...well, it was as if the Holy Spirit was pricking my pride. I flashed on that old bumper sticker you've perhaps seen---"Jesus is Coming! Look busy!"

I got a little nervous and hit the "Pause Button" on my self-congratulation. Why are we doing all this, I asked myself? Is being busy the same as being the church? Is being busy the same as being disciples of Christ? Why all this busyness? What's the real purpose of it all?

I pondered, and prayed about it for awhile. I tried to set aside my pride and go deeper. And here's where I came out. I believe we're doing all this because we have prayed. Because we have sought to open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to the needs of God's people—those in the church and those not in the church.

We pay attention to our longings, to our desires to grow and love God more deeply. We seek ways to share fellowship and worship and prayer. We reach out to serve others. All this "busy-ness" is our way of being disciples together as best we can figure out how to do in these crazy and wondrous times in which we live.

This is the second in our Fall sermon series on being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Today's theme: DISCIPLE—Pass It On. I believe that at the heart of all we do, all our "busyness," is a deep desire to pass on to others, to share with others, all that we have come to know and cherish in our relationship with Christ.

Here's what I mean. The Gospel stories for today are perhaps familiar to many—the lost sheep, the lost coin. 99 of the 100 sheep are safe and accounted for, but one has gone missing. 9 of the 10 coins are packed away, but one is lost. How many sermons have I heard and preached about these stories as being stories of God's great love for us. So great that God notices the one of us who has wandered off, the one of us not safely cupped in God's hand. And God will do anything, will risk everything--for the sake of the one.

I do believe this is the underlying saving word of these stories. However, it seems to me that the numbers have shifted, significantly. I think if Jesus were to retell these stories today he wouldn't be talking about the 10 and the one. Or the 100 and the one.

He'd talk about the few and the many. The few that are actively part of the church and the many who are not. The few seeking to live as Christ's disciples and the many who don't have a clue about any of that, or aren't even interested, or think they know, based on what they've heard, and don't want any part of it.

These are the times in which we live. This is the "new math." It would be more accurate to tell a story about the one who's in and the 9 who are not. Or, the one who is accounted for and the 99 who are not.

The thing is, God still loves the one and the 9. The one and the 99. BUT—our work as disciples just got exponentially harder. We, who now represent the one in the story, have to figure out how to reach out and share that love with the 9 and the 99. And the 999.

You with me on the new math, here? I'm talking about the times, the crazy and wondrous times, in which we live. In which so many do not know, may never have heard, may never have felt, just how very much God loves each and every one of them. Our work as disciples is to Pass It On.

And the thing is---in case you hadn't thought about it this way---this is why we do all that we do. It's not self-serving or self-aggrandizing "busy-ness." It's about creating ways for all kinds of folks to experience and learn a little about God's love.

I assume you're here this morning because church is precious to you. That faith makes a difference in your life. And I also assume that it's not particularly easy for most of us to put that into words, let alone to talk about it with someone who's not already a church person. Am I right?

Isn't it easier to encourage a kid to become a Scout, or invite a colleague to Kiwanis or Rotary or the Assistance League, or to tell someone about our new favorite restaurant, than it is to invite them to church with us?

So---what might we do instead? My contention today is that, as disciples, we do all the things we do in order to create many doorways into the fellowship of the church and the life of faith. Here's what I mean. Know some parents you started talking with at the Preschool Picnic who are wondering how they're going to teach their kids values or maybe about God? Invite them to come with you to Messy Church. Know some folks in your yoga class who are interested in the spiritual side of that practice? Invite them to come with you to Sacred Yoga.

Know people who love beautiful music but don't have the budget or the transportation to get to the Philharmonic? Invite them to come with you to church or a concert here. Know someone who's struggling with credit card debt or worried about financing a child's college education? Invite them to come to Financial Peace University. Know a fellow pet lover? Invite them to come with you to the Blessing of the Animals. Know someone who loves to sew? Invite them to the Prayer Quilt group or to the Wednesday UMW work party. Know someone who loves to read and talk about a good book? Invite them to check out the new Pop-Up Library.

You get where I'm going with this. We are busy because we are busy creating many doorways into the life of faith that are not threatening, not scary, not overwhelming...doorways that open into the path of faith.

Jesus calls his disciples--us---to yearn for others to know that which is precious and life-giving for us. And Jesus, by his example and his teaching, shows us how to relate to people where they are, how to love and know them by name, how to respect them, and how to move outside our comfort zone and open a door for them. How to pass on, to the 9, to the 99, that which is life-giving for us.

I recently heard a story about passing on the gift of life in a very literal way through the gift of organ donation and transplant. Across the years, a couple folks in our own congregation have received the gift of life in this way. The story I heard is about an opera singer, Charity Tilleman-Dick, who received a double-lung transplant at the Cleveland Clinic. She still sings. Opera! She was quoted as saying: "Some say life's not a sprint, it's a marathon. I say it's a relay.....we can give breath. We can give grace. We can give life."

Life's a relay. The life of faith is a relay as well. A key part of our work as disciples is to pass it on. To pass the baton to the next runner. To be a disciple is to pass on the faith we have received to others who still await the gift of life.

As we kick-off a new season in the life of this church, challenge yourself in your life as a disciple to invite someone to walk through this door into the life of faith with you. Pass it on! And be as joyful as are God and all the angels in heaven and on earth.

Amen.

Notes:

"Through Organ Donation, A Heart Lives On." NPR Weekend Edition Saturday, Aug. 13, 2016.

The DISCIPLE sermon series is drawn from the work of Martin Thielen in A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series. Compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.