

September 15th, 2013

1 Timothy 1: 12-17

Luke 15: 1 – 10

Okay so this morning there are a couple of different things that I am going to touch on and although they might not seem to be connected, I hope that in the end they all come together in one vision.

This morning we talk about change and transformation, we talk about the joy of God's grace, mercy and the pain of our pasts.

How many of us have lost something? I quite often lose my thoughts; actually that is a common occurrence for me. How many have lost car keys? How many have lost a wallet? It seems that when we lose a wallet it is a big deal, why?

I wonder if when we lose something like a wallet it is like we have lost a little bit of ourselves, a little bit of who we are and until we get it back, we don't really feel whole again. The reading from Luke this morning talks about something that is lost and the finding again of that which is lost. I was talking to one of the other students at the Atlantic School of Theology and she grew up on a sheep farm and she made the comment, I will not be liable for the truth of any such comment, that sheep generally stay reasonable close to one another and very rarely do they wander too far away. So, a lost sheep is unusual and something that a shepherd would notice and worry about. This time of the year we often talk about those who are new to our communities and we talk about being welcoming to those who are new. I have thought over the years about the concept of welcoming and although I agree with it idea, I wonder if we sometimes use this as a power thing. In other words this is our place and in welcoming you, we are giving you permission to join us. What would happen if we looked at this from the perspective of the reading from Luke? What if we saw those who were new to our community as those who are being found? Maybe if we think of them as members of the community who are being found and brought into the community, something that is missing for us. The more we find the more whole we become as a community of faith. We start to find those that were lost to us and we bring into the community and celebrate their finding and joining us in faith.

I am going to switch gears here and I am going to jump into my pop culture reference for the day. How many of you have seen Star Trek: The Next Generation? There is an episode of this show that originally aired in 1993 (wow am I that old) called Tapestry. In this episode Jean-Luc Picard is on an away mission with a group from the ship and during this mission he is shot by an energy blast. When Picard wakes up he is in a completely different place and there is his old nemesis "Q," an omnipotent being that seems to delight in making Picard's life difficult. Q tells Picard that he died during the mission and Picard does not believe Q. So, Q shows Picard a whole group of people whom Picard knows have died in the past to prove to Picard that he is in the after-life. Picard then proceeds to tell Q that it is his fault that he died. Q responds telling Picard that actually it is Picard's own fault as he, Picard, had a mechanical heart because of

fight he had gotten into as a young man, but had Picard had a real heart the energy blast would not have killed him. Q then gives Picard the chance to go back into the past to the fight where he lost his heart and change that event. With Q's assurance that only his own life would change Picard takes the offer and goes back. Picard goes back and changes that one event and in changing that one event he loses the friends he had, he forever changes who he is. In this new timeline we move to the present and Picard is the lowest ranking person on the ship and when he approaches officers about becoming an officer they tell him that he does not have the qualities that would make a good officer, he only plays it safe, and he has led a completely un-extraordinary life. Q comes back and eventually everything is put back to where it should be and Picard survives and continues on as Captain. So how could this story relate to our scriptures this morning? For me this episode of Star Trek also deals with losing something, losing who we are and who we were.

The First letter of Paul to Timothy has been at the centre of a bit of a controversy as there are many who believe that this letter was not actually written by Paul but was written by one of his over eager followers.

This letter begins without the customary thanksgiving that is the norm for Paul instead this letter begins with the call of Paul and a statement about who Paul was.

To be clear Paul was not always Paul and his life prior was a far cry from where he was when the Pauline letters were written. Paul was Saul a persecutor of Christians. Saul spent years hunting down and destroying those who followed this man Jesus. In the book of Acts we read of the stoning of Stephen and Luke reports that the witnesses to the stoning "laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul," (Acts 7: 58).

Later in the book of Acts Saul is still threatening the Christians and is on a mission from Jerusalem to Damascus with letters from the High Priests to the local synagogues so that if he found any who were followers of Jesus he could bring them back bound to Jerusalem. This is where something happened. It is during this time that Saul was called by God and changed that he became Paul. Yet in changing from Saul to Paul, Paul never forgets who he was, he never forgets those things in his past that he might have been ashamed of, those things that he wished he had differently. I remember hearing that when one looks at being born again in Christ that all of one's past mistakes and sins are wiped out, gone, wiped clean and I wonder if this is a good thing. God called Saul and he became Paul but he never forgot what he had done.

God forgives us when we make mistakes, when we sin, but we are also called to turn away from those sins, not to forget them but to turn to a new life. Picard at the end of the episode of Star Trek says; "There are many parts of my youth that I'm not proud of. There were...loose threads-untidy parts of me that I would like to remove. But when I pulled on one of those threads, I unraveled the tapestry of my life." We are challenged as Christians to accept God's loving grace and mercy, to turn away from those untidy parts of our lives that we would like to forget and to not lose those parts of ourselves that help us to be who we are today, including those parts that may not be so nice. God is always there searching for us as we get lost, but we need to remember those