

**Sermon at St. Andrew's Church**  
**September 11, 2022 – Proper 19 C – 14<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost**  
**by the Rev. Connie Jones**

*Luke 15:1-10*

When we divvied up Grandmother's things after she died a while back,  
 my daughter-in-law Madelaine won the toss for the little diamond engagement ring,  
 which she had a jeweler remake as a piece for her.

But the next Christmas, she surprised my daughter Cary with a present –  
 a pair of earrings made of two little remaining diamonds.

Cary has worn them constantly ever since.

I suspect they remind her of Grandmother, of Madelaine's generosity  
 and families connected over time.

Cary now admits it's not the smartest idea in the world to wear diamond earrings  
 on family hikes in the woods in north central Wisconsin, where she lives.

Where a branch you push aside as you forge ahead  
 can slap you back in the face and knock your earring off.

Well, one day last week, it happened in an instant.

Mom, Dad and the kids cropped to the ground to sift  
 through dirt and leaves and forest-floor muck,  
 searching as desperately as the woman in Jesus's story today  
 of the woman and the coin, the shepherd and the one lost sheep.

Treasured or important things seem to disappear themselves, don't they?  
 As if they blink out of existence.

Your day screeches to a halt until you find that one, lost, thing.

A letter, or a ring of keys.

You know the feeling of the frantic search, and then the rush of joy!

Throw a party! The lost has been found! Life can begin again!

**Now. We can't interview** a coin or a sheep or your keys  
 about the feeling of *being* lost and then found.

But one iconic testimonial is familiar to all of us.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me,

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

It was John Newton's hymn to God for saving him  
 from the sin of transporting and selling human beings into slavery.

**All these stories** of Jesus – the coin, the sheep, the prodigal son,  
 they're really about God, who is searching for *us*

as patiently and as intently  
 as any family on their hands and knees in wet leaves looking for a lost earring.  
**There is a profound intensity** in seeking and being sought,  
 a desperation but also an aliveness and clarity.  
 There's an almost electric connection between the seeker and the sought,  
 that somehow magnifies the value of each.  
 There's a vulnerability in the searching, a naked innocence, even.  
 And then an indissoluble bond afterwards,  
 between the one sought, and the one found.

For some, it's how they seek God.  
 But it is also how God comes looking for us –  
 with a focused, passionate desire to connect.  
 And notice this important detail in the Gospel.  
 The lost sheep isn't the A+ student in the flock to get lost.  
 And the prodigal son welcomed home by his father is a certifiable screw-up.  
 They don't exactly *deserve* to be found.

So however bumbling or lost or clueless we might be in our lives,  
 however many times we have failed, this is how God is seeking us.  
 We are more than the apple of God's eye.  
 We are the *diamond* he wants to pick up and hold in his hand.  
 Because it's the diamond of *his own image*,  
 planted in us when he made us, that he is recognizing.

**And down here in regular life**, here's the thing.  
 Every act of respecting and connecting with somebody else,  
 fully hearing them, sitting with them when they suffer,  
 is recognizing the diamond in them in a God-like way of love.

**We make a joke** here at church. Yes, the catechism says there are seven sacraments,  
 but the eighth is coffee hour!  
 Ask an honest parishioner why they come to church,  
 and they'll admit that yes, they are looking for God.  
 But it's the fellowship, the connections I make here!  
 People accept who I am.  
 Help me raise my children to be good and my family to be strong.  
 They laugh and cry with us, stand by us in trouble.  
 I'm here because of John, and Andie, and Harper, and all these new friends.  
*That's* why I'm here.

Notice that this is completely unselfish, yet deeply *personal*.  
 It feels right, and alive, and there's hope in it.  
 Theologian Martin Buber called it an "I-Thou" relationship,  
 this generous connection of heart to heart,  
 where somehow *you* make *me* whole.  
*That* is what we are looking for.

**And one more** thought.

I believe that in every prayerful act of intense seeking and finding,  
 sifting and turning up the soil and pushing the brambles aside,  
 in every act of inspecting things from an earnest new perspective,  
*God draws very close*.  
 Not to force our hand this way or that, but to bless the search itself.

**Does God already know** who our next rector will be?

I don't subscribe to the "God has this one plan" theology.  
 But I do believe that as we seek a new rector,  
 and as one special person considers us,  
 God is very present.  
 I believe too that if we ask for God's holy presence in the midst of all sorts of  
 uncertainty:  
 sending kids off to school, worrying about  
 crazy politics, crazy viruses, crazy floods when it hasn't even rained --and everything  
 else  
 we can be sure that God can find us there, and will never let us go.

**But in the meantime**, please make just one connection with somebody  
 here at church today.

Preferably somebody you don't already know.  
 In the pew after the blessing, or at coffee hour. Listen to one person's story.  
 Please also say a little prayer for our vestry in their search,  
 and another for the unknown person who'll be our rector one day soon.

**And.....oh yes!** What about the diamond earring!?

Cary and her family persisted (which is always good in searches, don't you think?)  
 Next day they dug again.  
 And right under that nasty branch, they found it.  
 Cary told me about the raucous rejoicing.  
 What did you *say*? I asked.  
 She said, "Well, it may be silly, but I said, 'There you are!'"  
 Not silly at all. Aren't those God's very own words to us, and us to God?

And the celebration began.

There in Wisconsin. And now here, a celebration at this altar  
because all of us who were lost, are now found.