

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Season of Creation II – Pentecost + 14 – Jer 4 11-12, 22-28, Ps 14, 1 Tim 1 1-2, 12-19a, Lk 15 1-10

In her talk on creation care, Pauline helps us see how we can all be careful with things that are precious. Most important is Pauline's commitment to care for the things that belong to everyone, like water, clean air and food. Because if we treat them badly, or if we're just not careful enough about them, everyone gets hurt.

In the reading we heard from Jeremiah, we get a shocking picture of just how dreadful the hurt can be if we don't take care; particularly when we don't think of God's poor. ^{v. 11} Jeremiah says it's God's poor who will be in the greatest danger. Anyone who exposes God's poor to such danger is described as *foolish, stupid and without understanding*. ^{v.22}

The dangers Jeremiah describes have uncanny similarities to the horrors that are afflicting the vulnerable around the world right now. Hot winds ^{vv. 11-12}, disappearing wildlife and entire populations leaving, ^{v.25} desertification, ^{v. 26} and the heavens turning black. ^{v. 28} His choice of words – Earth being waste and void ^{v. 23} – is what Creation was before God's Word called forth light and life. ^{Gen 1.2} Jeremiah is describing 'de-creation.' ^{v. 27a} The other time de-creation was described in Scripture was Noah's flood. ^{Gen 7.11}

Maybe the fact of this warning coming from an acknowledged prophet rather than from today's studiously ignored body of

climate and environmental science might be able to get humanity engaged more deeply. Maybe Jeremiah's direct language about foolish stupidity can spur the action we all must take to care for Earth and for God's poor.

I'm grateful to Pauline for reminding us of a time before we became so insulated from the realities of daily life; a time where we lived in a world where we all had to be careful just to get by; where we all had to look out for each other just to survive; a place of deeper and more truly connected community. Europe looks to be facing the challenge to recover this in the coming winter.

These very important reminders take us into the same place that Jesus' parables do – the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. I find hope in the interpretation Brother Benedict Ayodi gives them. He's a Capuchin Franciscan friar from Kenya. He writes about these parables in a joyous way that I find inspiring. And because he has taken a vow of poverty and joined a community, for me, his words carry great integrity. He says,

The two parables tell us that God loves us equally and will not rest if only one sheep is missing nor one coin is lost. ... Parables always teach us about ourselves. The lost sheep is helpless and vulnerable; it needs the flock and the shepherd to protect and guide it. Just so, every person is created to find meaning and fulfilment in communion with God, and others – thus the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbour. The lost coin is completely without value unless it is possessed by its owner. Likewise, each of us has a mission in life, a purpose and a task, but its proper place is within Christ's Kingdom. These are wise words.

Further thoughts from Br Benedict can be found at
<https://preachingforgodsworld.org/season-of-creation-week-2-14th-sunday-after-pentecost/>

So today, we've heard Pauline telling us about the nuts and

bolts of her take on creation care. Then we've heard Jeremiah warning us about the absolute dangers of injustice – of selfishness. And we've heard Jesus answer the cruelty of an apartheid world of insiders and outsiders; of haves and have-nots in his parables. Jesus confronted this head on with God's love for every last one of us – especially for the poor and the least and the ones who have strayed or been excluded or lost. God is willing to risk everything to retrieve these lost ones.

Br Benedict says this *'... expresses a crucial truth. Giving something up for something less significant is a feature of heavenly power rather than human possessiveness.'*

We are called to learn to be more like God, to form a community which cherishes all creatures as God does; to leave our own importance behind and enter into the wonder of God's love for each and every part of Creation.

This call challenges us to see that the self-deprecation which can honour God's cherishing of the smallest and most needy is intrinsic to justice in the world.

Such humility is needed for proper care of the Earth that is God's gift to all. The Church community – some 2.38 billion of us – is capable of bringing this lovely way of God to a world that is daily more desperately in need of justice, peace and faithfulness. And today, we have been shown practical ways in which we can each join in this mission. Amen