

C Narrative 30, 2017
April 2, 2017
Poulsbo
Pastor Alison Shane
Luke 18:31—19:10

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from God our father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Remember those three lost and found parables from a couple of chapters ago? Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son...you know, the ones where we learn that in Jesus, God seeks out and saves the lost.

Here are three more stories of lost things: the disciples, a blind man, and a man named Zacchaeus. Jesus is still trying to make his point about seeking out the lost, because people still don't get what he's doing and why. Which is why our first lost boys are the disciples. Jesus tells them – again! This is three times, now– that he's going to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised. And their reaction? Uhhhhh. They've got to grasp at least something of what Jesus is about, or they wouldn't be following him. But this death and resurrection thing really has them flummoxed. But Jesus keeps walking toward Jerusalem, drawing them along. They'll get it soon enough, and rather rudely.

As Jesus moves on, he hears someone yelling to him from behind the crowd. Twice. Jesus stops. Seeks him out. Saves him. Because this man is lost, and it's not because he couldn't see where he was going. There's a little word in this story that's different from other healing stories: again. The man asks, "Lord, let me see again." This is a man who used to have his sight. In becoming blind, that society kind of didn't know what to do with him. He was out of a job, he was no longer a productive part of his family. Because he was reduced to being a beggar, he had shifted rank in the societal structure, and that throws their whole system into disarray. So one who changes rank (up or down) was expected to fix the situation and get themselves restored to their correct position. Good luck with that.

That's why Jesus healing his sight was a saving act. Jesus restored him to himself, to his community. He was no longer lost.

Jesus came to seek out and to save the lost.

And Zacchaeus longs to see him. Zacchaeus has been a misunderstood character for a long time in Western thought. It's easy, on the surface here, to think of him as lost just because he's a tax collector, and we know how people feel about tax collectors. And he seems to repent and everything is better. And that's how it's been interpreted, so people keep translating it this way, because everybody likes a good repentance story.

The problem is, that's not what it says. When the people grumble against Zacchaeus, he actually stands up for himself. He is not declaring what he's going to do in the future, he's stating how he has been behaving, how he is currently behaving, and how he plans to continue behaving. "Look, half of my possessions I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I pay back four times as much." The Torah requires a return of 20%, this man pays 400% back. This is a good man. The name Zacchaeus, after all, means "clean, pure, innocent." That's not irony. This is who he is.

But in behaving this way, he acts contrary to society's expectations of a tax collector, and they don't know what to do with that. He has changed his place in society, and now he is lost.

And Jesus stops. Seeks. And saves. Jesus restores him to community by declaring him to be a son of Abraham.

Jesus seeks out and saves the lost. Three more stories of lost boys.

There's another character in these stories, a character equally lost: the crowd. The crowd is following Jesus. They like a good show, and he puts on a good show. Another healing. Yes!! Praise God. Hanging out with sinners? This guy needs to get his head on straight. Again and again Jesus does the same things, and again and again, the crowd is slave to their misconceptions about Jesus, evidenced in their attempt to silence the blind man and their grumbling about Zacchaeus. They don't get it. More than a great healer, more than a great teacher, more than the Messiah they were looking for, Jesus has come to seek out and save the lost.

And then there's one more lost character in these stories. The listener is always a character in a good story, and this is a good story. How often have we caught ourselves having distinct ideas about what God should be doing in this world, and therefore not seeing what God IS doing in this world? How often have we found ourselves having distinct ideas about who God should be working through, and therefore not seeing who God IS working through (Zacchaeus was a grand example of serving the neighbor, but the people couldn't see it)? It's OK for God to heal someone (especially if it's someone we love). But God couldn't possibly be working through that other person who so obviously isn't part of the Christian kingdom.

And this thinking causes us to miss out on the whole point. Jesus came to seek out and save the lost. Jesus came to suffer, die, and be raised. That's not how we expect God to operate, so it's hard for us to see God's work in this world in the unexpected, and therefore hard for us to put down our preconceptions, our misconceptions, and help with God's kingdom work.

We are blinded by the walls we put up, the lines we draw, the us/them dichotomy we create. So we cannot *see* our own lost-ness, because we are lost in ways we don't expect. So we cannot *see* God at work. We cannot *see* God seeking us out. We cannot *see* God saving us. And we cannot *see* how we can help God heal and restore and save.

But Jesus keeps at us. Jesus came to seek out and to save the lost. Like Jesus keeps trying to get the disciples to understand, like Jesus keeps trying to *show* the crowds what he is about, Jesus keeps seeking us out, standing before us, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" And in that moment, staring Jesus in the face, we recognize our own error, our own fault, our own sin in our preconceptions and misconceptions. Staring the cross in the face, we see that God's love has no bounds, but ours does. And we can only say, "Lord, let me see again."

And Jesus saves you. Opens your eyes. Opens your eyes to his work for you, opens your eyes to see, really see, your neighbor. Jesus looks up into your tree and says, "Ah! There you are!! Hurry and come down. I have a surprise for you. You are mine, and we have work to do."

Amen