

## New Life in Christ

Have you ever felt lost before? I realize that this is a loaded question and one that can take on many forms and dimensions in our lives. My first reaction to this simple question takes me back to my childhood when my family visited Disneyland. I must have been around 5 years old at the time, because we still lived in Arizona and drove to California to see Mickey. You can imagine that Brad and I were through the roof with excitement as we thought about the rides we were going to go on and what the day had in store. As we got close to the park, our parents went over some ground rules with us. They told us to always stay together with them and if we got lost, we were supposed to find someone who worked at Disney and ask for help. It is a very good thing that we had this discussion, because every parent's nightmare did end up happening that day.

After going on a few rides together as a family, Brad, Dad, and I wanted to go on the Tomorrowland rides, so we split off while my mom took a break. We went on Buzz Lightyear and when we got off the ride my dad looked at the map to see what we should do next. I noticed that my shoe was untied, so I knelt down, tied it, and when I looked up a few seconds later, Brad and Dad were gone. I started to panic and called their names as people rushed by in all directions. I began to cry and felt paralyzed by the negative emotions and worry going through my head. Luckily, I remembered my parents' rules, and I looked around and saw a Buzz lightyear staff member dressed up at the entrance to the ride. I ran over to him with tears in my eyes and said I couldn't find my dad. He knelt down and helped calm me a bit by telling me that everything was going to be ok, and we would find him. After radioing the situation in, it was only a minute or two before my dad came running up with Brad in his arms and gave me a big hug. To this day, I still remember that horrible feeling of being lost. Have you ever felt lost before?

(SERMON SLIDE) We find ourselves in the fourth Sunday after Pentecost today, which is a season when we discover how the Spirit is at work around us. The two readings that we just heard Louise share, invite us into the sometimes difficult reality of life and faith. The Psalmist cries out to God and feels lost as enemies surround them and they feel alone. Then, Paul in his letter to the Romans, calls out those in the community who had lost their way and were living in sin. These readings call us to remember whose we are, no matter what it is we are facing or how lost we may be.

Here at the church, we are moving through the summer months as we celebrate 60 years of existence. (CELEBRATE 60 NEW SLIDE) Former Associate Pastor Kendra Grams kicked off our summer series of hearing from members and past staff about what PPC has meant to them and what they are excited for in the future. Today, we will hear from Elder Beatrice Laryea about what the church has meant to her and what she is looking forward to in the years ahead. Our community is also in a bit of a transition phase right now, as we begin the search for a new Director of Music. Often, in these times of change and transition, we might feel lost, anxious or worried about what will happen. If you have had these feelings recently surrounding this change, know that our scripture passages today offer a balm in the midst of uncertainty. For, we are not alone in feeling lost or unsure of where we are going.

So, as we ponder what it means to feel lost this morning, I will offer three poems and a bit of my story as examples. It is my hope that we will recall how we might navigate these difficult times in our lives by turning to the one who will be there for us even when no one else is. To start us off, I will begin

with a poem by Dan Brown who is a poet in the UK. It is aptly titled Lost and captures many of the dimensions and nuances of how we might feel lost in the world. It goes like this: (LOST POEM)

Lost by Dan Brown

“Lost in a world, that scares me to death,  
Lost in a crowd, I'm losing my breath.  
Lost as a boy, lost as a man,  
I need to grow up, don't think I can.  
Lost as a person, can't find my way.  
Lost in life, every day.  
Lost in worry, who am I?  
All my life, I've lived a lie.  
Lost to kindness, lost to love,  
Lost in a sky, like a new-born dove.  
Lost in thought, which I shouldn't do,  
It winds me up, I can't get through.  
Lost to comfort, all kind words,  
Lost to advice, it isn't heard.  
Lost to those who really care,  
All these people, always there.  
Lost in me, I need a break,  
Lost in wonder, which road to take?  
Lost in a place I don't know well,  
Where are you now? There's no one to tell.  
Lost here, all alone,  
Lost apart from the mobile phone.  
Lost still, there are no calls.  
I'm struggling alone, to break these walls.  
Lost in mind, lost in soul,  
Lost memories, they're just a hole.

Lost family, lost mate,  
Gone now, yet I'm full of hate.  
Lost in a straight world, and I am gay,  
Lost now, for what to say,  
Lost in boredom, think I'll leave.  
There's a lot in life I need to achieve."

Dan highlights how being lost can take on a number of forms. (SERMON SLIDE) We might feel physically lost, like a child at Disneyland, emotionally lost, spiritually lost, vocationally lost, socially lost, or any other number of other forms. There are so many things that can veer us from our path or make us feel helpless. There are so many ways that we as humans can and do feel lost.

In many ways, the Psalmist exhibits these same emotions in the reading we just heard. They expressed how they were in a state of great suffering, despite following what the Lord had commanded. Hear their anguish once again, (PSALM 69:8,10-12) "I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children... When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me." The Psalmist is describing how they felt alone in the world, estranged from family and friends alike. They were doing what they were supposed to, but they were caught in a cycle of great anguish. When things don't go our way, we can often lose sight of what is important.

One of the difficulties of life is that there are times when we can feel lost, even when we are doing what we are supposed to do. I experienced this a bit in college and Divinity School when I was on my own for the first time. I knew that I was being called into ministry, but really struggled with being away from family and finding my place. I didn't do a great job of adjusting, and often found myself alone in my room and afraid or not willing to go to events or social gatherings. This isolated me a bit from those around me, as I turned to video games, tv shows, and other distractions instead of building and finding community. I was lost, as the Psalmist, even as I was doing everything I was technically supposed to do. Luckily, the Psalmist and I were not alone in this time of our lives, as we had someone to turn to.

Hear how they called out to God when they were feeling lost: (PSALM 69:14-15) "Rescue me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the Pit close its mouth over me." The Psalmist didn't lose sight of their faith in the midst of the storm and turned to the Lord. They trusted that God could and would be there for them and deliver them from the troubles that they were facing. We sadly don't hear how the story turns out for this ancient poet, but we do see something interesting happen as the poem continues in Psalm 69. When we hit verse 30, we see the author's lament turn into praise as they worship God and remember the promises that God has made. (SERMON SLIDE)

The Good News this morning is that we are not meant to be lost. Rebekah Ann Stephenson helps us remember this simple truth of our faith in her poem also titled Lost:

Lost by Rebekah Ann Stephenson

“When you’ve wandered off the path  
and don’t know where to turn,  
When the waters are no longer calm  
and the sun begins to burn-  
When it feels as though all is lost  
and troubles overwhelm,  
Remember that you’re not alone  
For God is at the helm.  
There is no fear in being lost  
With Him to steer your ship,  
Your course is mapped, your life vest on-  
So just enjoy the trip.  
Relax and let your life unfold  
and trust that all is well,  
For life at sea is sometimes rough,  
As sailor’s often tell...  
But then the tides will turn and dawn  
Will start a brand new day,  
What once was lost has now been found,  
And you are on your way!”

Rebekah reminds us that God is always behind us and promises to be there for us no matter what. (SERMON SLIDE) There is perhaps no better reminder of this in our faith than our Baptism, which Paul alluded to in our Romans reading. In baptism, we are named and claimed as God’s beloved. This is not something that we had to earn or deserve, it is something that God freely gives. Even before we were born, God knew us and loved us more than we could ever know or imagine. Two weeks ago, we celebrated Brightness’ baptism here at the church and beautifully claimed God’s love for her, while remembering God’s love for each of us. Baptism brings us into New Life in Christ, no longer lost, but found as beloved children. And as beloved children, God will always be there for us.

Now, this isn’t something that should be taken for granted or abused. Paul called out many of the Romans for taking this teaching or privilege too far and using it for their own gain. (ROMANS 6:1-2 SLIDE) In the first two verses, Paul called out some in the community for not living as they should. He

said, Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? It is true that we believe in a God who will be there for us and forgive us no matter what we do. Yet, that is not an invitation to do as we please, live in sin and then cash in our forgiveness later. No, God is calling us to a new life in Christ, a life that challenges us to be different as a result of the great love we have received. (SERMON SLIDE)

These summer months we will continue to hear how we are called to live as Christ's disciples, a changed people because of what the Lord has done for us. But, before we end, I want to circle back to the question we started with: Have you ever felt lost before? And maybe more do the point: Might you feel lost right now? If the answer is yes, know that you are not alone as we have all been there. Know that you are not alone, because our scriptures and faith remind us that God has our backs. For we are called into new life in Christ and will never be abandoned. This is something we need to constantly remind ourselves of as we lose our way in the world in various ways. Yet, we claim the amazing grace of God who has found us and loves us more than we could imagine.

We end with the familiar words of a song and poem that many of us hold dear. (AMAZING GRACE SLIDE) It reminds us of whose we are and the new life that we have in Christ. Sing or hum along if you would like...

Amazing Grace

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost, but now I'm found

Was blind but now I see"

This is the Good News that we claim today and need to remind ourselves of when we lose our way. Amen. Let us stand and sing of the new life we have in Christ as we proclaim that Christ is Alive!