

Sermon- 9-27-2015

Text- John 17; Matthew 28; Luke 15

Title- Helping People Find Their Way Back to God (Reflect)

When my daughter Aria was four years old she loved to play hide and go seek as most kids do. In particular she loved hiding. But she wasn't very good at it. She was only four! The game almost always played out the same way. I would count to 30- slowly and very loudly, and when I was done, I could count on finding her in one of a few obvious places. Closet. The Bathroom. Pretty standard 4-year-old hide and seek. Until one day it wasn't. I remember reaching 30 and heading upstairs. Aria always hid upstairs. That's where her room was and the odds were pretty high that that's where she would be. So to draw it out a bit, like any good dad would I would start in another room- talking out loud to myself the entire time. "I wonder where Aria could be? Is she in the laundry room? No. Not in the laundry room." After trying a few places I knew she would never go, I headed for her room and the inevitable giggles I would start to hear any time I got close. Only there were no giggles as I entered her room and no sign of Aria there either. Just a blanket and some toys on the floor. I peeked into the closet and no sign of her.

Now, I'm a competitive sort, and this started to bug me a bit. My four year old was not supposed to be able to stay hidden from her father. That's not how this was supposed to go. So I redoubled my efforts. I checked the other rooms upstairs. I looked under beds. Still no Aria.

Please understand, I'm not one to get too panicked about things. I'm not a terribly excitable sort. But this had my alarm bells up a bit. I had just checked every known place that Aria- my four year old- would usually hide. She wasn't anywhere upstairs. I re-checked every single room. I looked in places she would never hide, just to be sure. Maybe she hid downstairs? I couldn't recall a single time she had ever hidden downstairs, but I decided that's what she must have done. So I went all through the house. I looked in every corner, behind sofas, cubbyholes, & closets. I scoured the place and there was no sign of my daughter anywhere. Now I was getting worried. She wouldn't go outside? I went out to the garage. If she was out here she was going to be in trouble! No sign of her. Now I'm full on panic mode. Where Is My Daughter!!

I re-entered the house and charged to the kitchen where I knew my wife had been working. To this point I had been trying to keep my composure each time I passed by her. I didn't want her to think me ridiculous because I couldn't find our four-year-old in a game of hide and seek. But all bets were off now. "Have you seen Aria? Do you know where she is? I can't find her anywhere?" Jennifer could see the look of concern in my eyes and the two of us headed in separate directions to search the house. I went back and rechecked the downstairs. Nothing. I rushed upstairs and saw my wife reclining on our bed with a book in hand- a little smile on her face.

“Oh great!” I thought. “Where is she?” “Maybe you look in her bedroom again.” I returned to Aria’s room. There was still no sign of her, just the blanket and toys. The *blanket!* All this time, quiet as a mouse, Aria had been hiding in plain sight, bundled in a blanket in the middle of the floor in her room.

Apparently I’m not very good at Hide-and-Seek. But what can I say? You get a little bit nutty when you think you’ve lost someone, right? If you thought you had lost your daughter you’d have scoured the house too!

Ok, I know my situation was a bit ridiculous. But my guess is, you know the feeling. We all know what it feels like to spend those nervous moments hunting for someone you love that’s been lost. Maybe you were in a store and you turned around and couldn’t locate your child- so you raced through the aisles until you could locate them. Maybe you’ve spent time walking the neighborhood and hoping your loved one will turn up. Maybe you’ve called and left messages and gotten worked up because someone said they would be home by a certain time and they’re hours late. Maybe you’ve even hoped in your car to go the last place you knew they were supposed to be. Or maybe the person your seeking isn’t even physically lost- but their heart or their mind is. Maybe you’ve been seeking to help someone who’s making terrible choices, or someone who’s hurting.

When someone we love is lost, something inside of us compels us to seek them out- to search- to help. We’re not at rest until we do. It’s no surprise that we’re wired up this way. It’s the way our Creator works too. This describes the heartbeat and mission of Jesus! In fact, if you want to know what moved Jesus’ heart what, and how He changed the world, you’ve got to look at his life and ministry!

If you want, turn in your Bible to Luke chapter 15, or follow along on the screens. Let’s read these verses together.

1 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. **2** This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

3 So Jesus told them this story: **4** “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. **6** When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ **7** In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

8 “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? **9** And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ **10** In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.” **Luke 15:1-10**

A lost sheep and a lost coin. These seem to be the subjects of Jesus’ story, but really, the focal point should be placed on the ones seeking those lost things. Jesus was explaining the heart of the God who seeks.

Today, I want to do my very best to explain the heartbeat of Harbor of Hope. It’s important, especially during this season, for all of us to have clarity around our purpose. You see, whether you’ve been coming here for years, or months, or have just recently joined us, we all will want to be a part of a church of which we can say, “that’s my heartbeat too!”

For over 15 years, Harbor has had one mission and one aim as a church... To Help People Find Their Way Back to God. This mission has shaped us, and fashioned us. How we go about services and ministries here all bear the distinctive hallmarks of our vision to Help People Find Their Way Back to God- from the type of architectural details we use, to the style of music we play, even down to the way we design our programs- it’s all tailored to be as effective as possible in achieving our mission. And that mission isn’t complete until everyone who comes through our doors knows what it means to live fully, love deeply, and give freely as a reflection of our gracious God.

In fact, that word: *Reflect* is the title of our teaching series. For the next four weeks, we are going to give our attention to the “heartbeat” of Harbor of Hope. Because when we say that our mission is to Help People Find Their Way Back to God, it’s simply a reflection of God’s heart for humanity. He’s the God who seeks. He longs for people to find rest and restoration in Himself. He is like a father searching for His child, anxious to bring them home. He’s like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep- and venturing off into the dark to bring it back safely. He’s like a woman who has lost a valuable coin who scours the ground until it turns up.

So when we- this collection of lost and wayward children who have found our hope in God- when we have opportunity to direct others to this hope, we share. We open doors. We open arms so that others can come to know the joy we’ve found. We join God’s search party. Not because we’re so smug and confident that we’ve got it all figured out. Our desire to Help People Find Their Way Back to God is not the product of condescension, as though we’re the keepers of all goodness dispensing it upon our whim to those we deem worthy. Not even close.

We reflect the heart of the God who seeks to save the lost because we were once lost too. Broken. Misguided. Wayward. Selfish and self-concerned. And we've been restored. Loved. Forgiven. This isn't an ego-trip. In fact last week we learned it's the opposite. It's a byproduct of humility.

When you discover just how incapable you are of being your own savior and lord- when you realize that you are *not* God- and once you've learned that The Almighty Creator of the Universe, who does exist, was willing to lay down His life for you, and you let Him come into your heart to rule and reign over your life- when you've experienced that degree of transformation, the most obvious next step is to share what you've experienced.

We Help People Find Their Way Back to God, because we see the hope and transformation it's brought about in our own lives and we simply cannot help ourselves- we have to share it!

And just in case that wasn't quite motivation enough, we get a picture of Jesus' heart. You see, if we're going to be a church that reflects the heart of Christ, then we must be a body of believers who openly, bravely, sacrificially pursue the marginalized, the broken, the outcast & the "sinner"-because that is what He did.

18 Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. 19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

20 "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

*22 "I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. **John 17:18-23***

These are some of the verses we read just last week, but please pay attention to the way Jesus starts His prayer. "Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." And how was Jesus sent into the world, you may ask? In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 9, we get a very crisp description. (**Matthew 9:35**) – "*Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom.*"

Jesus was sent to proclaim the Good News. He was on mission to Help people by sharing the Good News. What is the Good News?

The phrase 'good news' is actually the word 'gospel.' At the time when Jesus chose this word to describe his central message, the term "gospel" had both a historical and cultural context.

The gospel was "news that described an objective, history-changing event that affected everyone's situation."

For instance, when Caesar Augustus ascended the throne in Rome, there is a document that reads, 'This is the beginning of the gospel of Caesar.' Meaning, now that Caesar is in charge, there is provision and protection for you under his rule!

The most famous use of the term "gospel", outside of scripture, describes the events of 490 BC when the Persians invaded Greece, landing near the plain of Marathon on Greece's Eastern coast. When the Athenians went out to meet the Persians in battle, against all odds, they prevailed.

Now, as legends have it, when the Athenian general saw that victory was at hand, he sent Pheidippides back to Athens with the good news. Pheidippides ran along the coast some 25 miles before descending into the city (which is where we get the modern-day distance for the marathon). When he arrived, he announced, "Rejoice, Good News, We conquer!" Then he fell over dead.

Pheidippides brought gospel to Athens...news of a history-changing event that affected everyone's situation!

Why is this important! Many people today (probably some of us) view Christianity primarily as a series of instructions or advice. So...if I go to church, or say my prayers, or participate in certain sacraments and rituals, and if I try very hard to be a good person, then I can have a relationship with God! I'm a Christian!

But the gospel isn't at all about what you must do to get to God. The gospel is Good News about what God has already done, in history, for you!

Here's the Good News (gospel)! Although God could have moved away from us because of our sinfulness and pride, instead He broke into our world in the person of Jesus Christ, to die the death we deserved to die, so that we could come back into His arms.

When you and I were far from God, Jesus loved us, and He came for us. Jesus Christ became a sin offering and He died in your place so that you could walk free, fully forgiven and healed! Jesus endured your penalty...He was stripped, beaten and killed so that you could be made right with God!

By his mercy He forgives us! By his power, He heals us!

He is the God who seeks out the lost. In Christ we see this pursuit on full display. If we are to reflect the heart of God, then we must join him in this mission. Jesus actually makes this commissioning a command in Matthew 28.

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." **Matthew 28:18-20**

We have a clear mission. We are called to Help People Find Their Way Back to God. So how are we going to do it? How do we make the mission a reality? If the Good News is really Good News, then it must not only be announced...it must be applied personally.

Many Christians have this notion that we respond to the good news of what Jesus has done for us one time. That we needed the gospel when we were very far from God, when things were really bad for us, and our sin was really dark. And of course, this is true. We do need the gospel during these times. But once we come to Jesus, oftentimes we live as if we are to work out the implications of the gospel on our own. We live as if it's our responsibility to become a better man or woman, or spouse or parent or neighbor. And that it's our job to muster up things like kindness and courage and patience and self-control.

Jesus saved me- now it's *my* responsibility to prove that I was worthy of being saved!

But that's not how this works. The gospel teaches that we grow up in Christ by applying the gospel deeper and deeper into our hearts. By setting our minds over and over again on the beauty of Christ and what He has done for us until it overwhelms us! As the gospel truly becomes GOOD NEWS to your heart, you'll celebrate it- then you'll want to obey God, and you'll freely repent of sin (not because you're terrified of what God will do if you don't obey Him, but because you love Him!)

To the degree that you trust in what God has done for you through Jesus and apply it to every area of your life, it will change you!

So the way the Good News begins to have influence in this world is when it begins to change *us*- but it doesn't stop there!

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.’” **Matthew 9:36-38**

Compassion – The word ‘compassion’ means ‘to be gripped in the gut.’ Jesus was overcome with emotion for those far from God. So...he sends us out to proclaim the Good News!

When God calls you in, He will always send you out!

We don’t go to church. We are the church

We don’t leave the church (when we walk outside).

We walk out of these doors with a God-given calling to live out the gospel! To live with a sincere compassion for our neighbors and friends and to be open-handed with our lives! To give away our resources and time in radically generous ways! So that people can see the greatness of Christ and turn to Him.

As we close, let me ask you two questions-

1 – Have you responded to the gospel personally?

Have you ever asked God to be Lord of your life & publicly confessed your faith in Christ?

2 – Are you living out the gospel practically?

Imagine what would happen if each of us were committed to HPFTWBTG. What if each of us were committed to Helping One Person!

Praying (Asking God to give us His heart for them!)

Encouraging a Neighbor

Serving a Colleague

Sharing our Lives with a Friend

Inviting (bring them to Harbor with you)

Sharing our Story (This is what Jesus has done for me)

If you are in Christ, you have been uniquely gifted and positioned to help someone in a way that only you can.

Who is it for you? Who is it that you’re pleading for? When people look at your life...do they see you and question what it is about you that makes you live the way you do? Is the gospel changing you that deeply? That practically?