

SERMON TITLE: "Celebrating Our Tenth with Community"
SERMON TEXT: Luke 15:1-10
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: October 22, 2017, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

As you've been hearing (and singing), we're celebrating our church's tenth year here at this Marriott-Slaterville location. Last week, we held our tenth annual Veterans Tribute Run & Chili Cook-off. Julie Coley has reminded us that this is the tenth year for our Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, and the choir and Bell Tones have begun preparing music for our tenth Christmas in this sanctuary. And now, we're looking forward to everyone's pledges to help us with our ministries for 2018, when we will celebrate our tenth Lent and Easter, and when, in April, we will arrive at our official tenth anniversary of worshipping God in this building.

To help us celebrate all that, I'm preaching a sermon series based on biblical stories that involve the number 10. Last week, we talked about celebrating our tenth with the guidance of the Ten Commandments. Today, as we focus our attention on Jesus' parable of the woman who had 10 coins, I invite you to consider how this woman's story affirms the joy of celebrating our tenth with community.

1—LOST & FOUND EXPERIENCE

Let's begin with some background. The parable of the woman and her 10 coins is one of three parables in Luke 15. All three of these parables have to do with something or someone that was lost. At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus tells the story of a shepherd who had 100 sheep. One of them wanders off, so the shepherd goes and looks for it until he finds it. When he returns home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, so they will rejoice with him that his lost sheep has been found. Likewise, at the end of the chapter is the story of the prodigal son, who demands his inheritance and goes off and spends all his money in wild living. When he returns home, his father eagerly welcomes him and throws a party to celebrate that his son who was "dead" is now "alive."

In between those two stories, we find the parable of the woman who had 10 silver coins. Actually, she isn't just one particular woman. Jesus poses the story as a question about a universal, every-woman kind of experience. "What woman," he asks, "having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?" Immediately, we're drawn in, right? Who among us, woman or man, hasn't lost something and had to turn on the lights and search through the debris to find what we were looking for?

Many of you remember that I had to get a new car in May because my old one was totaled. A guy rear-ended me when I had stopped for a pedestrian in a crosswalk. That disconcerting accident happened in Montana, on my way to visit my mom, so I ended up buying a new car while I was there. The specific reason for that trip was to help my mom move, so there was a lot going on. Besides the car hassles, Mom and I were moving boxes and vanloads, hanging blinds and pictures, sewing curtains, and dealing with some hard decisions and emotions.

Anyone who's ever moved knows about that kind of chaos and can maybe understand that, when I was ready to leave and come back home to Ogden, I couldn't find one of my two electronic car keys. I searched in my personal stuff, in mom's old house, and at mom's new apartment. I asked one of mom's friends to please check and see if I had accidentally left the key in their car. I called a couple stores where I'd been, to see if I might have dropped the key somewhere and maybe someone had turned it in to lost and found. I even called the salesman at the car dealership and asked him if they really gave me two keys. He said they did and that those electronic keys are pretty costly to replace.

I wasn't very happy about that. But I had to leave. So I packed my suitcase into my trunk and headed down the highway. Mid-morning, I stopped to get gas and use the facilities. When I tried to lock my car, it refused to cooperate. Why? My new car has so much different technology than my old one. So, at first, I couldn't figure out what was going on. Why wouldn't my car lock? Then I remembered something I'd read in the manual. The car won't lock if there is a key inside. The key I'd been using was in my purse

outside the car. So that had to mean my missing key was somewhere inside the car. But I'd locked the car before without any problem.

So the key had to be related to something new I'd done that morning. What had I done differently? I'd put my suitcase in the trunk. Of course I had looked through my suitcase before(!) but had I missed it? So, standing in the gas station parking lot, with my trunk lid up, I opened up my suitcase again and started rummaging around. And there, in one of the small pockets was my electronic key, where I had probably put it for safe keeping and promptly forgotten. What a relief! What a joy! I immediately called my mom to share my celebration!

2—SHARING IS UNIVERSAL TOO

I think we can agree that this kind of experience is common to all of us. The trauma of losing something important and the relief and joy of finding it is universally human. The impulse to then share the celebration of that discovery is also an important part of our human experience. Just like I immediately called my mom to share the good news that I had found my missing key, the shepherd in Jesus' parable called together his friends and neighbors, the father told his servants and sons that they were going to have a feast, and the woman with 10 coins invited her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. According to Jesus, even the angels in heaven celebrate together whenever a lost sinner repents and is found.

This desire and need to share our concerns and joys is one of the really important characteristics of the church. Various scriptures tell us that, in the body of Christ, each part is affected by the others. We are called to encourage one another, pray for one another, and even offer material support to one another when needed. And, when one rejoices and praises God, sharing that positive testimony of joy is beneficial not only for the one, but also for the many. This good news is what gives us all courage and hope for those times when we too experience losses, disappointments, and set-backs. The most basic story of Christian faith—the death and resurrection of Jesus—is the most classic story of traumatic loss and rejoicing in the discovery of what was gloriously found.

Here at First United Methodist Church, we're really good at this caring and supporting function of Christian faith. Our expression of concerns and joys in the large sanctuary, our prayers in smaller groups, and our email prayer requests help us all to connect as a congregation. Just as the woman in the parable would invite her friends and neighbors to celebrate with her, we don't live this Christian life alone. We do it in community.

Sometimes a negative, or opposite example, helps make a point. In yesterday's *Standard Examiner*, there was a story about a bank manager in Bountiful who embezzled \$495,000. The money was "lost" from someone else's account and "found" in his. He used the money to buy a house. He would have liked to keep his misdeed a secret, but his theft was discovered. Technically, the now-ex bank manager is still innocent until proven guilty. But, if convicted, he could end up with a sentence of 10 years in prison.

I can't speak for you, but I'd sure rather be *here* celebrating 10 years of our congregation's ministry at this location than suffering from 10 years in prison! Not everything that's private is bad, but the things that one suffers or celebrates all alone are often the wrong things in life. The things that we bring into the light to request healing and help are usually the losses that can be found with joy. Those are the matters that give us an opportunity for celebrating with community.

3—WHAT HAVE WE LOST? HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE?

So, I'm going to ask you and me, Is there some aspect of our lives where we are lost? Is there something we do that causes us or others to experience loss? Of course there are losses that we can't prevent, that are beyond our control. But are there also ways in which we defeat ourselves and cause our own troubles? There are many kinds of losses in life, but since the parable of the woman with 10 silver coins was about money, let's be specific about that for a minute. Do we lose money to gambling or overspending? Do we lose a lot of money to finance charges? Do we lose money because we don't invest it wisely? Do we lose money because we don't take care of things we have and thus have to replace them more often? Are

there ways we could be better stewards of our own personal finances? Are there ways that God could turn on the lamp and shine some light and help us find a better way to live?

John Wesley thought so. He had a little saying about money. He said we should earn all we can, save all we can, and give all we can. He taught his followers to work hard and be industrious. Those of us who have been studying Francis Asbury and the early American Methodists have learned that, while most of the first-generation Methodists were poor, the second- and third-generation Methodists were usually better educated and had a higher socioeconomic status. There's just something about following a Christian lifestyle that helps a person increase in financial well-being. When you don't spend your money on gambling, drinking, and other excessive entertainments and when you don't make idols of material goods, you end up being more effective in your work and you save yourself from waste. Not having lost money, Christian people usually then have more to invest in their own children and the community, so that quality of life improves for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Of course there's a cost to this kind of celebrating with community. When the prodigal son returned home, his father ordered the servants to slaughter a fatted calf for their feast. Even though we often see pictures of the good shepherd bringing back his one lost sheep to the flock, we who are realists know what the fate of that sheep would eventually be. And even the woman, who lost and found one of her 10 silver coins, probably spent it on food and drink for her friends and neighbors who came to celebrate with her. But even if celebrating with community costs us something, it seems, still, to be an investment in the good of that community. As the community is mobilized for encouragement, support, and celebration--the lost are found, sinners are called to repentance and restored in grace, and God's angels in heaven rejoice.

I hope you agree with me that First United Methodist Church is an essential community of faith. Maybe if we turn on the lamp and get out the broom, we can find a lost coin that could be used for celebrating our tenth with community.