

Message: *Kin-dom Choices*

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day!

I'd like to share a little bit of my story today. In the spring of 2002, I participated in a three day event at which I acknowledged & surrendered to God's call to ordained ministry. That evening I came home, crawled into bed, and stayed there for 24 hours, wrapped in the cocoon of my comforter. I couldn't bear the thought of anything disrupting the sense of peace and wonder that I had experienced. I didn't know how to describe it, thus, I couldn't articulate or share it. Until recently... until I experienced the dramatic opposite... when Ivy Rose was, well, lost... that is she couldn't be found.

In end of June I stayed temporarily in Frederick, at my parent's house. The pups, Ivy Rose (5yo Chihuahua) and Zachary (11yo Chihuahua), stayed there, too. I came home one afternoon... it was hot, humid & storm clouds were forming. I just got out of the car and my Mother stepped out of the front door and called, 'IVY? IVY? IVY?' My heart skipped a beat and became alarmed. Mom, what's up? I asked. 'I can't find Ivy', she said. 'I've looked everywhere and I can't find her. I'm afraid she's lost.'

I struggle to keep composure and go through the house. Zachary is fine, but worried, because of the angst that is evident in our voices. My mother is practically in tears... I'm racking my brain to think of places Ivy would likely go in the new surroundings. No luck inside, I go outside, taking Zachary with me.

Ivy's original name was Shadow (aptly named because she is skittish and would hunker down under bushes when scared.) so I look under all the bushes around the house; we follow the path we walked the day before and even enlist help from those who sit on their patio... just to keep an eye out. No sign of Ivy, I call a friend who's cared for her and she says she'll come and help look. My pup is so small, and the world is so big.

Our scripture passages today are stories in which we can see ourselves. Paul gives thanks for a changed heart and life. A shepherd risks everything for a lost sheep. A woman searches all night for a lost coin. I was prepared to stay thru the storm to find this little pup.

There are three things that are important in these stories. First, it is all about the response. Paul gushes with thanksgiving for what God has done for him. Being one who acted in ignorance and without faith (hint... relied on/took pride in himself and his accomplishments), his encounter and response to the Risen Christ revealed just how ignorant and faithless he had been. And he lived the rest of his life sharing the good news as a response.

In the Lukan text, the response to finding what was lost is the same in both situations... there is great joy and celebration in sharing the good news of the find.

For me, the whoop and holler my Mother let loose with was joy-filled, indeed. 'Here she is, here she is' she cried. Ivy was located in her carry bag. She had her toy with her,

gotten in, but because Zachary's bag was on top, Ivy couldn't/didn't believe she could get out. So she waited until my mother moved Zachary's case before popping her head out of the bag. She was safe & sound, and now she was found! Yes, indeed, we celebrated... I called my friend to tell her, she told her husband to share it on facebook and the yoga class let out a collective sigh... AAAGGGHHHH.

Second, Not only are these stories of response important, but so are the persons/characters portraying the characteristics of our God... the one who searches at great risk... and through the night... seeking to restore our connectedness.

In Paul... the persecutor, we see how nothing can separate us from the love of God.

In the lowly, stinky, dusty, crusty shepherd, we can see how God would risk even his own life, in the one who stands at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder in first-century Palestine.

In the woman who only has ten coins to her name, we can see how little can mean so much. Particularly in the shepherd and the woman, these aren't just metaphors, but reminders how God works through ordinary people to do extra-ordinary work of finding someone.

Here's a relevant example (D.Lose. *In the Meantime*): On September 11, 2001 – fifteen years ago this Sunday – Welles Crowther went to work like every other day to his job as an equities trader in the World Trade Center. After the second tower was hit, the one he was in, Welles led everyone he could find down the steps to safety, and then he went back for more. And after leading more people to safety, he went back again, and again, and again, until the tower collapsed. On that day, this talented, athletic, good natured, but in so many ways ordinary person did an extraordinary thing, giving his life to make sure others could live. On that day, God used Welles Crowther to find people who were lost.

Thirdly, We may not be in these kinds of circumstances often, but God can use us to find others. In fact, God can, God does, and will use us... at work, at school, in Walmart, at the 50+ Center, wherever we are, God regularly nudges us to reach out, speak up, and walk alongside others. And there is great joy in heaven when we respond ... even more than when Ivy was found.

God chooses us... we choose to respond... or not. (Rev 3:20... Look! I'm standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will have dinner with them, and they will have dinner with me.CEB)

Since that 24 hr period in a cocoon, I have consciously chosen to serve... I choose to spread joy... it's not always easy... but with God's help, my friend Jesus, and the power of Holy Spirit, I can only, open the door and say, come on in, and I'm so glad I did, cause God's Grace is amazing! Amen.