

Being Lost (Luke 19:1-10)
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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/getting-lost/

When I was a little boy, probably about five-years old, I got lost in a big department store in Springfield, MO while my mom was shopping. I don't remember all the details, but I remember my mom reminding me to stay close to her while we were in the store. I was short, so I simply did what every other little kid has done since the beginning of time: I followed her leg around. I'm sure that every so often I became distracted by something interesting I saw on one of the shelves, but I quickly returned to that leg and followed it around the store. Up and down aisle after aisle. Finally, after what seemed like an hour had passed, I look up above the leg to say something to my mom – and my jaw dropped. I had been following the wrong thing. That leg that I had been following around was no longer attached to my mom! It was attached to someone else!!! I quickly made my way back through the aisles that I had walked, but I simply couldn't find my mom. Several minutes later, as tears pooled up in the corners of my eyes, I walked by the customer service desk and a kind employee noticed the distressed look on my face and asked if I was lost. Yes. As hard as it was to admit, I was lost and I needed help.

How many of you have ever been lost? Maybe not in a department store, but perhaps in a strange city, or deep in the woods, or on a road trip? It can happen to any of us, and has probably happened to everyone listening this morning. Losing track of where we're at and where we want to go happens more frequently than we'd like to admit. And it can happen more than once.

Spiritually, as "church people," we mostly think that being "lost" is something in our rearview mirror... part of our past, but usually not how we think of ourselves now. The words of "Amazing Grace" by John Newton paint the picture pretty well:

*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*

But as time passes as we move farther and farther from that time when we were spiritually "lost," we often become a bit arrogant. We sometimes forget that it's NOT US that saved ourselves, but instead our SAVIOR who rescued us back then – and continues to rescue us today and into the future.

Today we're going to look at the story in the Bible of a man who was lost, but discovered the SAVIOR that offered him Salvation. As we look at this story, I encourage you to think about when he realized that he was lost, and when did he become "found"? It's the story of Zacchaeus from Luke chapter 19...

Luke 19 (The Message)

19¹⁻⁴ Then Jesus entered and walked through Jericho. There was a man there, his name Zacchaeus, the head tax man and quite rich. He wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by.

5-7 When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home." Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him. Everyone who saw the incident was indignant and grumped, "What business does he have getting cozy with this crook?"

8 Zacchaeus just stood there, a little stunned. He stammered apologetically, "Master, I give away half my income to the poor—and if I'm caught cheating, I pay four times the damages."

9-10 Jesus said, "Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost."

This story raises some questions in my mind:

First, why did Zacchaeus so desperately want to see Jesus?

- Had he just heard about Jesus' reputation and it was kind of like if a celebrity were coming to town; he just wanted to see the man with his own eyes?
- Or maybe somehow Zacchaeus knew that he was "lost" in some way that he couldn't quite put a finger on, and he secretly hoped that Jesus might be the answer to what he was searching for?
- Could it be that some how he already knew Jesus? Perhaps the two of them had run into each other before, and now Zacchaeus was excited about the chance to see this amazing Jesus guy once again.

Second, when did Zacchaeus come to the realization that he was living for the wrong thing? That he was following the wrong leg around the department store; that life wasn't about getting rich and taking all that he could take, but that it was about caring for other people and loving them like God loved them?

- The way this story is told, it doesn't seem like he climbed that tree with the intention of ending his greedy, selfish ways. But perhaps that grumbling of those around him whom he had cheated convicted him? It's obvious that Zacchaeus had a reputation with the people of Jericho, and it wasn't the kind of reputation that anyone would want. He was known as a sinful, selfish, dishonest man.
- Or maybe just the pure presence of the One who was worth following – the presence of Jesus - helped open his eyes to his sense of lostness?

[And sometimes that's the way the Holy Spirit seems to get our attention. We go through life with blinders on, oblivious to how we're living for ourselves instead of living for our Savior, and

then a person or a worship service or something else that God places right in front of us gets our attention and opens our eyes to the fact that we're off track.]

- And although the language in this story is a little bit vague, most interpreters of this story emphasize Zacchaeus' desire to NOW make a change. He's not saying, "I already give away my possessions," but instead he realizes that's what he needs to do moving forward. Like he's saying, "From now on, I won't cheat and I'll make up for those that I've cheated in the past. I know my life has been off track, and I want to do what's right from here on out."

The third question I have is about Jesus's words to conclude the story: "Today salvation has come to this house!"

- Doesn't Zacchaeus need to do something spiritual... something kind of "churchy" first, before Jesus can say that? Doesn't he need to say a prayer or be baptized or take communion? Apparently not. [Please understand that those things are important as we do follow Jesus as individuals and as a church family. But they don't have to be the starting point for someone to begin a relationship with the Savior.]

Finally, Jesus sums up the "good news" that Christianity is all about: He "came to find and restore the lost." We sometimes make that much more complicated than what it needs to be. Jesus loves you and loves me. Jesus wants the best for you and for me. That comes when he seeks us and restores us. It something we can't do on our own. He's the Savior; not us. And I'm going to say it one more time: We all get lost; and getting off track is much easier than any of us care to admit.

What I'm about to do may be a mistake, but I'm going to do it anyway. I'm going to tell you a story about being lost that took place this spring. I pray that you'll hear it with the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus playing in the back of your mind...

On Sunday afternoon, April 25, a lady named Kathy showed up in our neighborhood and she was in distress. Her husband, Rich, and a friend, Mark, had gone morel mushroom hunting on a rugged, 80-acre piece of property near our home. They left at 1:30pm. It was now after 5:30pm. Both Rich and Mark were lost. Thankfully Mark had a cell phone and was able to call Kathy, who drove to find help.

But two things were concerning: Mark was in poor physical health to begin with, but the long hike and fact that both Mark and Rich had ran out of water meant that Mark's legs were cramping. On top of that, the sun was sinking toward the western horizon relatively quickly. Somebody had to do something to help those two lost men.

I'll be honest with you. I really didn't want to spend my Sunday evening tramping through rugged terrain looking for a couple of grown men that should have known better. (Have you ever had that attitude when it comes to people that need your help?) But thankfully, I wasn't in this alone. My family got involved, and one of our neighbor families jumped in to help search. Before long another neighbor – one that I'd never met before – also joined us.

After a quick strategy session to decide what we'd do, my neighbor – Greg – drove me to a drop off spot on his four-wheeler. I jumped into the woods and slid my way down a bluff toward the creek that Rich and Mark had been wandering around. Every so often, I'd stop and yell. I had only gone a couple of hundred yards when one of my yells was answered back. I quickly made my way to the source of the sound, and I still remember the look of joy and relief on Rich's face: He was smiling from ear to ear, and

it was as if he finally felt a sense of great relief... like “We’re going to be OK. We’ve been found!” Mark on the other hand, wasn’t doing so well. He could barely walk and needed water badly.

But there was nothing to fear now, because I had come to save the day – or so I thought. I told the two men that we needed to walk in a specific direction to get out, but after heading that way for only a few dozen yards, I realized that I wasn’t exactly sure I was on the right track myself. Thankfully, the sun was in the sky, so I looked up and realized that I was turned around 90 degrees from the direction I thought I was going. Instead of walking north, like I intended, I was actually leading them to the east – even farther away from where we needed to go. As much as I hated to admit it, I was lost. As much as I wanted to help these two men on my own, I needed help. I really needed two things:

- First, and most importantly, I needed to look to something bigger and greater than myself. In the woods, it was the sun shining down from above. In our everyday lives, it’s our relationship with Jesus that we must always look to and follow.
- Second, I needed others to help me out. Thankfully, I wasn’t trying to save these two men alone. My wife, my kids, my neighbors – they were all a part of the process. Through multiple cell phone calls and a sneaky little app my wife insisted that everyone in our family have that allows us to keep track of our locations – I finally realized which way we needed to go to make it back to civilization.

Over the next couple of hours, everyone worked together to help rescue Rich and Mark. Once we knew the correct direction to go in, and Rich had someone to guide him, he was out of the woods in no time. But Mark took longer. My son Titus and our neighbor Justin brought bottled water so Mark could start rehydrating himself. Several of us took turns helping Mark struggle up the side of a ridge, constantly encouraging each step and just simple being there for him in the struggle. Then finally, once we were on top of the ridge, Greg met us with his four-wheeler and gave Mark a much-needed lift back to the main road.

One other interesting thing I remember about those two hours: We got to know each other. Mark and I talked about work. The neighbor I had never met before who joined the search ended up asking if there was a good church in town that I’d recommend. We shared our lives with each other. When we are lost, God most often helps us find our way by placing people in our lives that will walk alongside us. And when we are “found,” God often calls upon us to walk alongside those who are trying to find their way. And in this crazy world, we often change roles in that scenario quite often.

Today, don’t forget the story of Zacchaeus.... Who realized he was lost and realized that Jesus was there to save him. Don’t forget about me, who thought I had it all figured out on that day back in April when I ended up realizing I was lost myself. And – most importantly – don’t forget about Jesus, who is always there – like the sun hanging in the sky – to help you find your way.