

Sermon – Sunday, September 11, 2022

Rev. Randi

When I was 13, I took a field trip to Paris with about 10 other 13-year-olds and two adults. Of course, the flight over was overnight, and, as you'd expect, none of us slept. So, we arrived in Paris exhausted.

It was Palm Sunday, and our first stop was Notre Dame Cathedral, crowded with churchgoers and tourists. A French woman called out to me and wanted to give me a palm. I reached out to take the palm and then looked around for the rest of my group. They were gone. There I was, 13 years old, in a foreign country for the first time, standing amid thousands of people and lost.

For the last several weeks, we've been discussing our responsibilities as disciples of Jesus. Another way to say that is we've been talking about the duties we take on in our Baptismal Covenant.

Reviewing these responsibilities, we've probably realized that we sometimes fall short. We don't always love our neighbor as Jesus loves us. We miss opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. We aren't always faithful in our prayers and church attendance. Sometimes we forget to stand up for the poor or the disenfranchised. We fail to give what we should to God's church. Indeed, if we use the metaphor of a journey to describe our Christian life, we sometimes become lost on our way to our destination.

Here's the Good News. When we lose our way, God finds us. We fall short of meeting our covenantal responsibilities, but God always keeps the covenant. In Baptism, we are sealed as Christ's own forever. Christ takes that seriously. He never lets us down. Like the Shepherd, he comes looking for us, the lost sheep. Like the woman, he comes looking for us, the lost coin. A God that comes searching for us is unique to the Judeo-Christian faith. No other religion believes that one of God's attributes is to search for us when we get lost. The image of Jesus finding a little lamb and bringing it home on His shoulder comforts us because it tells us that Jesus finds us and brings us home. No matter how lost we become, Jesus never stops looking for us until He finds us.

Those of us who are Anglophiles had an exciting week last week. For the first time in our lives or memory, a new sovereign has acceded to the throne in England. Charles III is now the head of state for the United Kingdom, the head of the Anglican and Scottish churches, and the defender of the faith.

The transition is interesting in the context of this week's lections. Elizabeth was a pious, grandmotherly woman who seemed almost saintly. Totally appropriate for a head of the church and defender of the faith. But Charles? If we consider Charles's life, we realize that for much of it, he was lost. He was married to a woman he didn't love while continuing to see his mistress. He was paired with one of the world's most glamorous jet setters while he preferred quiet walks in the garden. He was raised to fill the role of king, yet for 73 years, he waited. Lost.

But being lost for much of his life didn't prevent him from finally fulfilling the role he was born into. And all those times he missed the mark and failed to fulfill his marriage and Baptismal vows didn't prevent him from now being, not only part of the church again, but its leader and defender. When we are lost, God finds us and restores us. Sometimes God works through other people. Sometimes God works through events. But God searches for us, and when he finds us, God brings us back home.

When I was lost in Paris on the first day of my trip, I searched around the cathedral. I couldn't find my group anywhere. In the back of my mind, I remembered my Daddy's voice. My father had always told me when I was a little girl that if I were ever lost that I should go back to the place I last saw him and wait. So, I returned to the place I had been when the woman first gave me a palm. I had waited only a minute when one of the adults in the group found me and led me back to the group.

When we are lost, we just need to return to the place (physical or emotional) where we last experienced God. And there we wait. And God will find us and lead us home.