

Reading: Luke 15:1-10 NIV

SERMON

A time to search and a time to give up (Ecclesiastes 3:6)

A time to search and a time to give up. Many people are searching, but searching for what?

Love, Money, Fame, Self, Stability, Power, A Quest e.g. The Holy Grail, Happiness, Right Route, Halloween, Hope

Searching, searching, searching. But to search, does it mean that they have lost something. Of course it can mean that they have never had it, but are looking for it. In our reading we had two things that were lost

- One because of its own stupidity. The sheep wandered off from the others in the herd and got lost. How silly is that. But there are those today who have known the truth, have been shown the way, but still have wandered off. They have rejected Christ, they have rejected church, although sometimes they have not rejected spirituality. They are still very spiritual, but that spirituality may mean that they turn to another faith like Buddhism, or Islam, or even paganism. On the news this morning it said that Druidism has been granted the status of a religion, so it is now equal with Baptists!
- One got lost through no fault of its own. The coin was lost, but it did not lose itself as it is an inanimate object. We can sometimes moan about an inanimate object but it has no will of their own and so cannot hid and so be lost – it is just lost. As Sue said this morning I was not brought up in a Christian home – I knew nothing about Christianity for the early part of my childhood except when playing cards with my Granddad and very often he would make an expletive using some words from the Bible. It was when we moved and I was sent to a Christian club that I was first exposed to Christianity.

Was I lost before then or not? There are many today in this country who have never heard about Jesus, never heard about heaven or hell and so are still lost.

So what happens when we lose something, especially something very precious? We go out and look for it. Or if it is a way, we turn on the SatNav or ask somebody and why is it that you always ask someone who begins by saying “If I was you I wouldn’t begin from here.” And then goes on to say, “You turn left, then right, or is it left...no it is right, but the Pink Sign, you can’t miss it” And guess what – you can miss it because you do!

In the two stories the shepherd and the woman who had both lost something, for different reasons, when and searched high and low. The woman perhaps had the easier job as she had a more confined area to work in. The shepherd had the whole of the countryside, but he had sight and sound to go on. Both though searched diligently until the thing they had lost, was found. And where was it found? In the last place they looked. Because the lost thing is always in the last place you look because you never continue looking because you have found it.

And there was great joy and parties and rejoicing when the lost thing had been found.

So what does that have to do with us? Do we know people who are lost – some because they rejected God and others because they have never been introduced to God? We need to be searching for these people and helping them. For some it will be to win that back, to bring them back into the fold as that shepherd did. The sheep he found, may go off again, but at that time it was his responsibility to bring that sheep back who had wandered off.

Now I know the analogy falls down because people make up their own mind, but your life, your words will speak volumes to them and help them in their search. So many have left church, not because of faith, but because of somebody being inappropriate and upsetting them. We can do a lot to heal that hurt in our behaviour and our words without watering down our faith.

We can befriend the person and show that not all Christians were like the ones they knew. What do you mean? I was speaking to someone the other week who was brought up in a Christian home and every night they were made to read a portion of the Bible out loud with their parents. That may be good for some, but for this person it turned them right off reading the Bible and off church, because they perceived that all the people in their church were that rigid. Going to a different church, after a break the person has realised that not all people are like that and that Bible reading can be fun, does not have to be a chore.

So some people need their faith re-awaking. For others, those who have never heard, they need to hear about Christ and what he has done and what he is doing in your life. It has to be an ongoing experience. Can you say that? Or do you have to think hard about God doing things in your life?

So a time to search and a time to give up. To give up what? What in this life do we have to give up? Think about it.

Childhood, Teddy Bear as Comfort, Independence (I→We when married), Life, Children, Smoking, Weight, Addiction

It is right at times to give up, to give up trying to cling on to life and to die in peace with God. Is it ever right to give up on people?

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ "His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

"The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ "His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 25:14-30 NIV)

That's awful; the servant should have been given a second chance! No. There will come a day when we will all give up on people – that is the day when Jesus is coming back and all humanity will stand before him and then it will be too late – that is when we give up – there is no need, no time to search for people – it will be judgement time by the Lord of lords. The goats and the sheep will be separated and those who follow Christ will be accepted and those who do not will go to hell.

But what do we do before then – we keep on searching; searching to bring people into the kingdom of God so that they will be with those who go to heaven before it is too late.

Are you a searcher or have you already given up?