



## “LOST AND FOUND”

SCRIPTURE: HABAKKUK 1: 1-4, 2: 1-4; Luke 19: 1-10  
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

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The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

### **Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4**

1:1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

1:3 Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

1:4 So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous-- therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

2:1 I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

2:2 Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

2:3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

2:4 Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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### **Luke 19:1-10**

19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it.

19:2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich.

19:3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature.

19:4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

19:5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

19:6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

19:7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."

19:8 Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."

19:9 Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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Lost, A Poem by David Wagoner

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.  
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you.  
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,  
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.

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When's the last time you were lost? I mean really lost. Lost in a way that you felt your mind spinning, your heart racing, your body buzzing with a sense of foreboding.

When's the last time you were searching for the lost—the someone, the something gone missing, nowhere to be found. Lost in a way that you feel your heart drop and you feel panic setting in.

He was only 5 years old. And he wasn't the type of kid to wander off. But he could get lost in excitement or wonder. I didn't have time to think too much about probabilities or why he wasn't where he was supposed to be. It was downtown San Francisco in a crowded marketplace. 1000s of people and he was nowhere. He was gone.

"What did you say to him?" I frantically asked my nephew. He had been standing with Sidney in line at the ice cream shop. Everyone but me had gone in to get ice cream. I stayed outside with the sleeping baby Mary Elizabeth. They all came out with their ice cream and there was no Sidney.

"I told him to go get some money from you."

I was furious. Why would you tell a five year old to go anywhere by himself in this crowd? But I didn't have time to be mad at my nephew or my other nieces and nephews or my sisters who had been right there, too. The last time they saw Sidney had been well over 15, maybe even 20 minutes ago. Every second without Sidney was a chance for something awful to happen to him.

I just started running and yelling his name. I was terrified. "Sidney. Sidney! Where are you Sidney? Can you hear me, Sidney?"

A sea of strange faces and curious eyes met my gaze as I darted from person to person trying to will Sidney's face into my line of vision.

He's nowhere. I kept running and I came to a busy street that crossed over to a park, and the park sits on the ocean. There is a sea of people, of cars, of expanse and then the Pacific Ocean. And Sidney is nowhere.

If he walked across that street, how will I ever find him? The world was becoming like a black hole to me—sucking everything into itself with no way to connect, with no way to turn back the vortex of its oblivion.

I run back and forth between the ice cream shop and the street, through the throng of people seemingly not noticing me or my extreme fear. I run back to the road, this time ready to cross over—admitting to myself that he could have crossed the street—a horrendous thought—that a 5 year old could have been on that road alone.

Just as despair was starting to set in, I see Sidney off in the distance walking across the street from the other side with two adults, one holding his hand. I rush out to him. I can't remember what I said. And I can't remember much of what they said—

something about seeing him crossing the street by himself and thinking he looked too little to be alone. They asked him where he was going. He said he was looking for his mom.

Thank God the people who found him were kind and trustworthy people. Thank God I was running that way and saw them.

It took me weeks, maybe months, to stop waking up in a sweat from a nightmare of losing him again.

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Imagine God searching for us with that same urgency—the love that wants us close, the love that hopes we are well. Imagine God looking for your face, for your eyes to see her fierce love for you—hoping that you’ll find your way, hoping that you will connect with trustworthy companions and communities who can bring you along.

Can you imagine God loving you so, God loving us so—realizing we’re lost, realizing we’re not where we are supposed to be? And calling our names—searching the streets, the marketplaces, the crowded spaces.

Do we even realize we are lost?

Or are we like Zaccheaus, climbing up to where we think we’ll get a better look at Jesus, but instead finding ourselves farther away from him—only to be called back down into our lives with Jesus wanting to come into our lives, into our homes—to see the truth about us and how we live our every days.

Luke’s Gospel takes us through a series of stories of Jesus at the margins of society—with those cast out of society, with those lost in either social stigma or distorted perception or in a way of life that distances them from who God made them to be.

And in Luke’s Gospel those with extreme wealth have particular challenges in their life of faith, challenges created by the wealth that defines them.

The Zaccheaus story is unique to Luke’s Gospel and it gives us a story of what it looks like when a wealthy person lets God find them. The first thing Zaccheaus does is let go of pretense—in that culture a man of his wealth would never have run anywhere. That was seen as undignified and behavior that warranted ridicule. And he would have never climbed a tree--another behavior unbecoming and ridiculous for a man of his wealth.

When Jesus calls Zaccheaus down from the tree and says he is coming to his house, the entire crowd grumbles. But Zaccheaus is joyful.

Zaccheaus' vocation made him despised—he was an instrument of Empire—dispatched by the Roman government to extract taxes from the citizenry. The Roman government set the tax rate and tax collectors had to pay the amount they were supposed to collect up front and then go out and collect taxes from the people. So, it was common for them to collect more than the Roman government charged so that they could redeem their expenditure and make a profit. It was a position commonly abused.

Zaccheaus responds to Jesus with a remarkable readiness to be transformed.

The changes he outlines to Jesus on their way to his house both evoke the laws of the Torah and go beyond their requirements. In being found, Zaccheaus finds his place in community. He finds his deep connection to those impoverished and exploited by the systems that he benefits from—he finds his community when he himself is found by the one who knows him and sees him and calls him home.

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Habakkuk's rails against injustice and abuse of power echoing many of the Hebrew prophets.

But Habakkuk is unique in the way he persists with tough questions for God. He wonders how God could possibly be who God claims to be and the world continue the way it does—so afflicted by those who abuse their power. How does one continue to believe in God in a world with such injustice?

Habakkuk finds God not in his questions being resolved, but in the very question itself.

It is not certainty or detachment from what's wrong with the world that cultivates right relationship with God. Faith calls out to God, faith wrestles with God, faith doesn't let go of a vision of a better world.

Being found means discovering the contours of a faithful life—we seek God even as God seeks us. We rediscover our identity as God's people in a world that has lost its way where God can be hard to find.

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Can we let God find us—lost in crowds of people struggling to find their way, too? Lost in the morass of injustice and our own destructive behaviors. Lost in our reluctance to see ourselves clearly. Lost in the systems that rupture right relationship. Lost in the ways we neglect ourselves and others. Lost in the ways people disappoint us. Maybe even lost in the ways God has disappointed us.

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(Go to Table)

Sometimes we can't see the forest for the trees—God's love is as available to us as the air we breathe.

Jesus finds us here.

Jesus finds us where we find each other.

This is a Table of lost communities, lost people, lost ways of life, lost hopes and dreams and love. This is a Table of being found, not simply as wayward individuals, but as a collective seeking a better way of living together.

This is a Table where we are reconciled to God and to each other—not just in real time, but in God's time—in the mystery of God's power to heal—we become the Communion of Saints here—reunited with those we have lost, with generations of the faithful and the wandering, with the ethereal throng of God's people hungry to come home.

The ancestors gather at this Table—collapsing centuries and generations into a sacred moment in time. Here our grief and distortion, our wandering and our wondering, is met with the joy of feasting together once again on a taste of God's promises for us, the lost and the found.

Thanks be to God.