



***We Will Be Found***  
**A sermon for Northminster Church**  
**Preached by Claire Helton**  
**Covenant Sunday – Sept. 15, 2019**

Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

<sup>8</sup> “Or what woman having ten silver coins, <sup>[a]</sup> if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

A teenage kid with a bookbag on his back and a cast on his arm that no one has signed shuffles into school on the first day of junior year, eyes on the ground. Evan Hansen, a teenager who deals with severe social anxiety, has always struggled to make friends and feels as if he’s destined to live his life on the outside, always looking in at everyone else, waving through a window. Evan is the title character of the Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen* that swept the Tony’s in 2017, and I imagine his plight is one that many of us here can relate to, even if social anxiety is not our particular battle. Despite his feeling that he’ll never really be a part of things, through the course of the play Evan winds up inadvertently creating community among the students at his school

around their shared grief over a classmate who has died. He gives a speech that is then posted online and goes viral, allowing for thousands of others to draw inspiration from it, because the message is one that addresses such a universal need: "Have you ever felt like nobody was there? Have you ever forgotten in the middle of nowhere?" Evan asks. If you have, and most of us have, know that you're not alone. "Lift your head and look around," he sings, "You will be found."

Thirty years ago, there was a group of people in Monroe, LA discovering that they, too, needed a place to feel that they belonged. They were not so much sheep without a shepherd as sheep with a hard-won skepticism of all shepherds, gathering in one another's homes with no senior pastor among them (by choice), singing songs, serving communion to one another, studying the scriptures together, and ministering to one another's needs. Much like Evan Hansen, they found that they were bonded as a community around shared grief, the grief of feeling that they no longer had a home in the place they had once called home. They journeyed together out of that grief and into the shared purpose of creating a different kind of faith community. Like the woman with the lost coin or the shepherd with the lost sheep, they rejoiced each time one who had felt lost everywhere else found a home in their midst. They became in many ways an open pasture, a refuge and safe haven, where gathered the sheep who for any number of reasons were not welcome in any other fold.

In the book of Micah, chapter 6, verse 8, the prophet reflects: "God has told you, o mortal, what is good. And what does God require of you, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" The community that was formed here was just that: community first and foremost, a worshipping community grounded in a loving theology that prioritized this scriptural call to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. This verse became such an important part of Northminster's identity that it made its way onto the logo, the church sign, and (at the risk of giving away a big secret) even the Wi-Fi password. This threefold scriptural call – to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly – serves as a guide for our communal self-identity, so let's spend some time exploring those three aspects of our collective calling.

Do justice. When we do justice, we are pursuing God's dream for this world. One of my favorite children's books to read to our boys is a book called *God's Dream* written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. "Dear Child of God, do you know what God dreams about?" he writes. "If you close your eyes and look with your heart, I am sure, dear child, that you will find out." The prophets try to give us glimpses of God's dreams – the lion lying down with the lamb, a world with no more tears, the breaches of injustice repaired, widows and orphans given the care and dignity they deserve. In his parables, Jesus paints us a picture of the kind of world God dreams of – a world where those who are first stop caring so much about being first and try out being last for a change; a world where lifelong enemies are able to see one another's humanity and care for one another in distress. These concepts are really not all that radical. Knowing what's just isn't as difficult as we often want to make it; it's *doing* it that presents the problem. And doing justice is an individual responsibility – although we sure can accomplish a lot more when we do it together.

Do justice. Love mercy. When we love mercy, we learn to see the world through God's eyes, through the eyes of compassion, to use the lens that Jesus used when he looked out on this world. There is much that is broken in our world, much that is in need of loving mercy. But if we're going to learn to love like Jesus loved, we have to recognize that Jesus didn't only name brokenness. Jesus looked into the face of those who were broken and called them beloved, naming, too, what was whole and good and right in them and calling that forward. He called into leadership those who it was said had no business being in leadership. He carried those who needed carrying *and* he empowered others to do the same. Loving mercy means that when we encounter those who are, as Evan Hansen says, broken on the ground, in need of a friend to carry them through, we do it. And in doing it we empower them to go and to love mercy for another.

Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly. When we walk humbly with God, we will admit that as good as all this sounds...sometimes we fail. Walking humbly is perhaps the most difficult of these three tenets that guide our community – and I don't just mean because humility is hard. Most of us are here because for one reason or another, there was no other church we could go to where we felt like we could belong, like we could bring all of ourselves to the table and still be accepted.

And that is a beautiful and a holy part of the ministry of Northminster. But because of that part of our identity, I fear that we are particularly susceptible to the sin of pride; it's a short step from "thank God that I've found this community" to "thank God that we aren't like all of them." The key, I believe, to staying humble is to remain always in a posture of listening, of learning. There will be times – and have been already – when we won't live up to our calling, times we won't carry you or even know that you need carrying, times we will fail to listen when you speak (as much as we intended to listen!), times we will fail to show up. We are, each of us, on the mend from our own brokenness, and that doesn't change when we all come together in one place. This is why we practice corporate confession – it's why we must stay grounded in humility, listening to one another always, and learning each day how to love one another better tomorrow.

Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God.

This is what defines our community of faith. This community is where we learn what it is to listen, *and* to be heard – and then to speak up for those who never are. It's where we learn what it is to carry and to be carried, to find grace, and extend it to others. In this community of faith, we have all been both the lost coin and the searching woman, both the wandering sheep and the shepherd guide: the ones who have been found, and the ones who continue to hold open the gate for all those who are still searching for home. May we ever and always keep that gate flung open wide, proclaiming to the world the truth that has given us life: Here, you will be heard. Here, you will be loved. Here, you will be found.

Amen.