



CATHEDRAL *of the* INCARNATION

“Lost and Found”: First Sermon of the Rev. Adam Bucko as Priest

The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 15, 2019

The Rev. Adam Bucko, Minor Canon

Being Called

Today marks the first day of my priesthood. In these days leading up to my ordination, I've tried to make sense of the journey I've taken these last few years, and as I've examined and re-examined how God has so generously led me through the many ups and downs of my path, my mind and heart have brought me back to a community where I once lived, which played a pivotal role in directing me towards where I stand today.

The community was an ecumenical Christian community – a quasi-monastic community, if you will - located in the slums of India, where prayer and works of mercy met beautifully in sacred service offered to victims of AIDS, abuse, homelessness and social estrangement. As I re-experience that environment, I see clearly all the people who were brought to us every day. I see their broken souls. I see their gangrene-infected bodies, filled with maggots. I smell their wounds. I feel their very visible pain.

I also hear the bell calling everyone to chapel for morning prayers and then see the procession of broken and deformed bodies moving slowly towards the place of worship. Some are walking, some crawling because they are missing limbs, some limping. All are moving slowly towards prayer, understanding that what is about to take place will somehow infuse them with new life. Making their pain visible to God and their brothers and sisters will strengthen them and make them better.

I also see the missionaries of charity, all those sisters of Mother Teresa's, who liked visiting us sometimes. They would arrive after a two-hour drive, spent silently praying the rosary, and make their way into our community, entering it gently, always starting with the TB ward, filled with patients who struggled with multi drug resistant TB. It felt like each time they would find just the right person, the sickest and the weakest person, approach them gently, touch their feet as a sign of reverence, and then care for them in a way that, even today, moves me to tears. In their minds

they were meeting Christ, and the pain they were witnessing was the pain of their savior who was being crucified in front of them. That pain was to be met, embraced, and cared for.

When I reflect on my calling and on how I hope one day to have the guts and fortitude and courage to say yes to God, I am reminded of that place, where I witnessed people whose complete yes to God created a container of Grace where people were able to come in and be reassembled. Time and time again, brokenness was turned into wholeness, chaos into clarity and purpose, and the lost were finally found. God really lived there with us in that little community of broken people.

Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel lesson today gives us two parables, full of very rich images that speak to us of our human predicament and our tendency to get lost.

In the first parable - the parable of the lost sheep - we are presented with an image of a sheep that leaves the fold and wanders off on its own. Early Christians didn't hesitate to view the lost sheep as a metaphor for what happens in our own lives. We move from one thing to another and then there are glimpses of God that we see along the way. The second image that we are given is that of a woman with a lamp, who refuses to give up and tirelessly searches for a lost coin. Again, early Christians didn't hesitate to compare our very lives to that lifeless coin. The coin, with an image of a king imprinted on it, has value but only if it is found. Other than that, it is lifeless, it cannot move, and certainly it cannot find its own way back. We too can find ourselves spiritually lifeless and incapable of any movement. We too forget that we have an image of the one who gives us our very being and life imprinted on our hearts. And we too need help from that Godly presence and each other to help us sort through the dust of our lives, to feel and see again; to be home again and to know who we are born to be, and to whom we belong.

Glimpses of God in our Lives

In our lives, most of us have had glimpses of who we are in God or who God wants us to be. I know I have, and yet, it hasn't always been easy to respond and commit to that. When I look back, I know that...

God was there, during my childhood, making Himself visible to me in the faces of the heroic priests of my childhood in Poland, who protested totalitarianism because they knew that saying yes to God has to mean also saying no to everything in this world that violates God's love and justice. Some of them, including our parish priest, paid for it with their life.

God was there letting Himself become known to me when, as a child, scared of all the chaos and violence that was taking place in Poland as the totalitarian state was collapsing, I felt called to assemble a home altar and mimic what I saw priests do in church: say mass, and feel that even though everything around me was falling apart, I was being held by this Motherly presence of a loving God capable of dissolving my fears.

Finally, God was there calling me by name when, on a busy Indian street, after I went to India thinking, like many others, that I'd be able to get closer to God in the silence of some Himalayan Monastery, God showed up on the street and She grabbed me by the hand and asked me to accompany her on her journey of healing and hope. This time God had the face of a 13-year-old homeless child; her face burned with cigarettes, her body bought and sold many times, and her conscience nearly killed by the heartlessness and abuse of countless men.

It is that child that brought me to the community I told you about at the beginning of this sermon.

I went there convinced that I was going to make a difference and help find those who are lost. But instead, it is I who was served. It is I who was found. It is I who was given new life. Before that I was a lost sheep. I was a lost sheep making my own plans, always caring about God but imagining my own ways of getting closer to and serving Him. And most of it had very little to do with God. I was just wandering from one patch of grass to the next, and the grass always seemed greener wherever I was not. But there came a time when the aimless wandering had to stop because Christ in the form of a homeless child showed up and knocked on the door of my heart and asked, "Can I come in...do you have any space for me there?"

And from then on he began walking with me. His wounds became a mirror for my own wounds. Like those crawling, limping, walking brothers and sisters rescued from the streets, there was no reason to pretend that I am more than I actually am. There was no need for niceness and pretense, no need to waste time on anything that is not a real cry of the heart. Because "Fruitfulness comes out of brokenness" after all. And, like "soil which becomes fruitful when you break it up with the plow" we too can only receive God's gift and life when we name the need for it.¹

It is for this reason that all the sheep in the parable are meant to move together and stay in their fold. We too are meant to travel together, with each other, in community, mirroring to each

¹ Tippens, Darryl. "Loneliness and Community: An Interview with Henri Nouwen (Mar – Aug 1994)." Wineskins Archive, February 21, 2014. <http://archives.wineskins.org/article/loneliness-and-community-an-interview-with-henri-nouwen-mar-aug-1994/>.

other what Christ would want us to see in ourselves. Together we can learn how to take off our masks and be who we really are. Together we can help each other see and celebrate. Together we can give each other strength and learn how to take turns holding each other's pain. Together "we keep on returning to those we belong with who keep us in the light." Together we can, not only say yes to God's constant searching for us but can join the search and become part of the rescue team.

How are You Being Called?

And so, as we meditate on these images of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the Motherly God tirelessly helping us to sort through the dust of our lives to see who we are meant to be and why we are here; as we meditate on these images and relate them to our own lives:

How are you being called today?

Where do you find yourself on the map of lost and found?

How is this place, this church, and this community a home for you?

And how are you home for others, who come here and are longing to be affirmed, cared for and seen?