

Definitely Not Where's Waldo

A sermon preached by the Rev. Ken Gray
Church of the Advent, Colwood BC

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A POPULAR CHILDREN'S BOOK SERIES

Where's Waldo? is the title of the first Waldo book. Released in 1987, the book was the result of more than two-years of detailed work by illustrator Martin Handford.

Where's Waldo? introduces readers to Waldo, a distinctively dressed man, as he sets off on "a world-wide hike". Waldo travels to everyday places – such as the beach, the ski slopes and the zoo. The book features 12 detailed 2-page illustrated spreads of the different locations. Somewhere amid the crowded scene is Waldo and readers are asked to scour the detailed illustrations to locate the lost traveler.

Waldo sets out on his journey equipped with 12 items to help him on his travels. He carries a walking stick, kettle, mallet, cup, backpack, sleeping bag, binoculars, camera, snorkel, belt, bag and shovel. As Waldo journeys from location to location he loses one of these items, and asks the reader to locate the object left behind in each scene as well.

I was never very good at playing Where's Waldo. I can't find most things at the best of times. I hunt for glasses, wallets, papers, books, even pajamas, all the time. Other members of my family are very good at Where's Waldo. They look at the busy pictures and examine colour combinations, contrasting shapes, details of faces and objects, and usually succeed in finding Waldo's trail, and quite often, Waldo himself.

For them, the fun is in the looking. Just how Waldo feels about being found, well we really never know.

The Gospel story we heard today is likewise about looking, where God looks for human beings just like us. The way the story is told, God never gives up. I give up, but God never, never, and lets say the word a third time, never gives up. The same story is told twice, once through male experience and once through female experience. The message is the same however. God is in agony until the lost sheep ... or the coin ... is found. Each story is an agony of separation. Here are the two stories:

GOSPEL Agony of separation 1

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? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

The shepherd demonstrates a singular, illogical concern. Find that lost sheep ... regardless of what happens to the other sheep. I know this wont work with my two dogs, hunt for one, you lose the other, guaranteed. But in God's world, pursuit of the elusive guarantees results. And when the lost is found, its party time! Everyone gets in on the act. And the singing of gospel songs draws a crows which makes the band play louder and brighter. This . . . is a good news story.

GOSPEL Agony Story #2

'(W)hat woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until

she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

Again the community gathers. Discovery of the lost breeds enthusiasm and joy. So many folks still seem to think that religion, and specifically Christianity, is a private affair. This reaction has more to do with people’s insecurity and a lack of spiritual courage than with Christianity itself. Christianity is a lifelong group celebration, in good times and bad. Yikes, look at today’s reading from Jeremiah; life was inconsolably bleak, but the community still gathered and heard Jeremiah’s tough Godly message.

So why the party? **Because the agony of separation is over!** You see it at airports, boyfriend is reunited with girlfriend, families or colleagues reunite after physical separation. The same thing it seems happens, on both earth and in heaven. God’s angels are ecstatic. And to the ones who never knew they were lost in the first place, they just don’t get it! And that’s a crying shame. But the ones who loved the wilderness, only to discover its barrenness, well, they are thrilled to be back in the fold. Its like clergy who take sabbaticals, its great to be away for a while, only to discover its better to be back.

It is assuring to me, and probably to you, that God expresses delight not only in our presence and creation, but in our well-being. Salvation--which means a healthy relationship with God--is God’s constant desire, and the purpose of Jesus’ life, speech and witness.

With other computer enthusiasts, I marvel at the ability of Google and other search engines to help me find things—books, audio recordings, favourite songs, telephone numbers, quotes and stories. If I were so inclined I could even find members of my graduating class. In these

endeavours, I am the one doing the searching. In God's view, I am the one being sought. its funny, but it seems to me that we humans are more accustomed to searching than to being found. It sounds very narcissistic, but in God's eyes, I ... and you ... are the prize, the one worth the effort, the object of commitment. There is no better solace for low self-esteem, than a dose of God's persistent love.

Every once in a while, a text, or poem or piece of music really expresses this Godly commitment well. For me the traditional hymn COME DOWN O LOVE DIVINE is such a creation.

Come down, O love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
till Love create a place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

And now ... our speech turns to song . . .