

Of Toads, Sheep and Coins. Dale Ramerman. Luke 15 1-10 yr C proper 19. Christ Church Anacortes, September 15, 2019;

Our lectionary readings are on a three year cycle, and I keep all my past homilies. So in preparing for this homily, I looked back at my past sermons to see if I had preached on today's readings. And Bing-go: on September 15, 2013 I preached on these readings. My first thought was that no one would remember what I said 6 years ago, so I could use it again! That sermon, entitled "Of Toads, Sheep and Coins," focused exclusively on our Gospel reading.

Well, I am going to start with Psalm 14, because it addresses concerns we share.

Psalm 14 is identical to Psalm 53 except Psalm 14, uses the personal Hebrew term for God, YHWH, while Psalm 53 uses a generic name of God, Elohim.

[pause]

"Fools say in their hearts, 'there is no God'" is a familiar phrase, often used to argue for belief in a God. But this Psalm is not a defense against atheism or a rant against secularism. Rather, Psalm 14 calls out those who deny God's concern for those who are exploited. Psalm 14 is concerned with social justice, not belief, and the Psalm suggests our chief error is oppression of the vulnerable, not secular unbelief. The folly the psalmist attacks is the folly of social injustice that cuts the oppressed off from God. The psalm is a cry for God to judge the world's injustice.

A willingness to confront and work against injustice and oppression is an important dimension of our ministry at Christ Church. We are deeply concerned with exploitative behavior; we want to help effect healing, restoration, reconciliation, and restitution. Hearing or praying the words of Psalm 14 gives voice to those who experience cruel or repressive relationships or circumstances that call for God's justice in the world.

The psalm is a promise that God cares about the plight of God's suffering children, from the youngest to the oldest.

As wealthy North Americans, we have much to confess, and express remorse about, including our rejection of the homeless, blocking our borders to prevent the entrance of asylum seekers and refugees, exploitation of low wage workers, and the monopolization and abuse of the earth's natural resources. We may say, "Oh, that's not us, it's the Manic Tweeter." This is where our confession of sins done on our behalf, come into play. When the President builds a wall to exclude refugees or demeans people by juvenile name calling, those actions are sins done on our behalf, whether we like it or not. We have a representative democracy, and our President acts for us.

Psalm 14 assures us that God cares about the plight of God's suffering children of all ages and nationalities. We, as followers of Christ, are invited to support and participate in God's healing work. We must confront, renounce and transform the ways we are complicit in unjust behaviors, close to home and around the world. This is what being Christ's discipleship requires of us. This is what we commit to when we say in our Baptismal Covenant: we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as our self; we will strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

Now the Gospel, which our Bishop says must be the primary focus of every homily.

Each year in the early spring the Pacific toad descends from the meadows in the Kootenay region of SE British Columbia, headed for the long narrow lakes of that region, where each female lays thousands of eggs. In late spring the eggs hatch and by early fall the tadpoles have become millions of very small toads, about the size of a fingernail, and they emerge from the lakes and head for the meadows. But to get there they must cross Highway 6 which takes a long time for a tiny toad. So toad lovers have started a Toad Festival where folks, mostly kids, come with buckets to find the baby toads before they reach the highway, carry them safely to the other side, and release them to continue on their journey. The toads don't seek out this help; the kids seek the toads.

Our Gospel reading is often read as part of a collection parables about what we should do: go out and seek the lost sinners and bring them into the fold, or seek through confession and contrition our own way back to God. Our Gospel reading, however, suggests that it is God who does the seeking out.

The great Anglican preacher, Lancelot Andrewes, preaching for King James on Easter 420 years ago, said of Christ:

**He is found of them that seeke Him not,
but of them that seeke Him never but found.**

Those who do not seek God are found by God; those that seek God are also found. God calls us. We are found by God regardless of our own efforts, just like those little toads which merely seek to follow an instinct to hop toward the hills but are picked up and carried across the highway. The lost sheep does not seek to be found. A lost sheep curls up in a sheltered place and remains quiet. The lost coins are completely passive. And in the next parable in this series in Luke, commonly called the parable of the Prodigal Son, the son does not seek to return to his former status in his home. Rather, he sneaks back to work as a hired hand. The father goes out and calls him in and profusely welcomes him. The parable would better be named the Parable of Prodigal's Son. The point is the father's prodigal love, not the son's prodigal debauchery.

So God searches us out, and all we must do is respond to God's call.

As we move more deeply into a year of discernment at Christ Church, we will not be focused initially on whether any particular member of the congregation feels called by God to assume some leadership role. Rather, we will explore who you all discern, as a faith community, God may calling to serve in some new way.

So listen, watch, pray about those you sense God might be calling.
Amen

Dale Ramerman
Christ Episcopal Church, 9/15/19

