

## “Hide and Seek, Lost and Found: A Sermon on Community”

We begin with two questions:

*Have you or someone you loved ever been lost?*

*Have you or someone you loved ever been found?*

This morning I bring us three stories in response:

The first comes from my colleague in ministry Carl Scovel,

Who tells the story of the summer night he and his wife

Were in a big city park,

And because it had been so hot during the day the park is just teeming with people

Who are reveling in the chance to get outside in the comparatively cool

Evening air.

Carl and his wife walk through the park for a while,

And then in the distance they see a crowd of hundred or so others gathering

In a semi-circle – black people and white people,

Chinese, Hispanic, upper crust, down and out, Yankees Fans, Mets Fans,

Sox fans.

And there in the center is a five piece band – drum, sax, trumpet, clarinet,

And trombone -

And they are playing the Golden Oldies from the 1940's.

Songs like Muskrat Ramble, Tuxedo Junction, String of Pearls, and In the Mood.

Carl and his wife sat down on nearby park bench and soak it all in.

For the last number they cut loose on “*When the Saints Come Marching In,*”

They were half-way through, folks tapping their feet, folks singing along,

And the trumpet was just beginning to take off in what they'd call a

‘cadenza’ in Symphony Hall,

When the band manager came to microphone –

A grey-haired man with glasses and a shirt tail hanging out in the back.

The music slowed to stop,

And then the manager, looking flustered, said:

*“Seems like a lady here lost a couple of children and she needs our help.  
Their names are.....”*

He paused and then turned to the mother behind him,

A woman in her early 40’s, her beautiful face pale

And her eyes wide.

*“Their names are Sophie and... Sophie and Lily,  
So, if any of you see them....”*

And then the mother, despite her growing fear, and her shock,

Came up to the mike and began to speak.

*“They are three and five. Sophie has a brown dress with a white sash  
Around the waist,*

*And Lily has cream shorts and a dark blue jumper.*

*Please, she said, her voice rising in desperation, her eyes growing  
Wider, please look around you.*

Suddenly the mood in the crowd shifted.

Everyone - that entire, diverse community of people –

Began to call their names – *Sophie!! Lily!!*

Some left the crowd to poke around the trees and bushes.

Others went down to playing fields to look there.

A police officer riding a large horse was called over.

*“Where are they!”* the mother pleaded.

*“Where are my babies?”*

For those of us with children or nieces or nephews or grandchildren,  
this is the nightmare scenario, isn't it?  
So we can imagine what the beautiful, ashen-faced mother was feeling  
When in the darkened distance, on the edge between where the open field  
Ends and the woods begin,  
Two little girls come streaming down the hill –  
The white sash on one, the cream shorts on the other –  
Reflecting in the moonlight.  
Streaming down the hill and running into the arms of their mother.

Do you know how you can sometimes feel when the whole world around you  
Exhales in relief and release?  
That's how it was that night.  
The band manager, now with his whole shirt un-tucked and hanging out,  
Signaled to the band.  
The drummer picked up the beat.  
The trumpet picked up again the cadenza.  
And the crowd, let's call them a community,  
clapped and cheered...and breathed deeply  
While the mother embraced her children in the center of them all.

And with that story in mind I'll ask our questions again:  
*Have you or someone you loved ever been lost?*  
*Have you or someone you loved ever been found?*

Now hold that example in mind,  
And go with me to a neighborhood called Park View,  
Big brick homes, fenced back yards, alleyways,  
Plenty of nooks and crannies to hide there.

There is Patrick, there is Jamie. There is Tim.

There is Derek. There is John. And there I am.

Why are we there?

We are there to hang out with Steven, our classmate,  
Who one month before learned that his parents were splitting up,

Dad now living in an apartment several towns away,

Mom still in the early days of being in this big house by herself

With four boys,

Steve lethargic at school, not showing up to any sports,

Not showing up to our homes to play, hiding, really, from all of us.

So we go there.

Someone had the idea of playing Sardines, that version of Hide and Seek

That has one person hide and everyone look for them, hiding with them

As they do so.

And so we send Steve off to hide.

And then we announce in that declaration that as adults

We probably wish we could hear in our life more often:

*Come out, Come out Wherever You Are!*

And we go off into a six different directions,

All trying to find our friend Steve, who is hiding – hiding in this game,

And yes, I now realize these years later, hiding with his pain.

This may sound like a flaw for a UU minister, but I am a bad seeker,

So bad that I seek them out for what seems like ages.

I check behind the dumpsters in the alleys, in the dumpsters,

Behind the Wetzel home, which was terrifying, because Old Man Wetzel

Was terrifying. Still nothing. I'm seeking, I'm searching,

My friends are lost and I'm lost without my friends...

Until I see a heave of movement over there, in the neighbor's  
Stairway that leads down into the basement.

I run, there is more heaving, and there is loud laughing now,  
And there is Derek, there is Jamie, there is Tim, there is John, there Patrick,  
And there, in between them all, in the center of them,  
In the center of this little community,  
laughing for the first time in weeks and weeks, is Steve.

And with this story of seeking and finding,

I'll ask our questions again:

*Have you or someone you loved ever been lost?*

*Have you or someone you loved ever been found?*

And our last story, the one we heard already,

About the younger son who says to his Dad (and to his mom, too, let's update  
this):

Mom and Dad, *you know, I'm not going to college,*

*I'm not playing this game. I'm gonna strike out on my own and do things my way.*

And so he asks for his share of the 529 college fund, and unbelievably

They give it to him,

And he goes off to California and lives it up –

Hollywood, Sunset Strip, weekends up to San Francisco.

He does it all. But eventually his wild living catches up with him  
and he has nothing left.

He's tired of eating saltines and tuna for dinner. He misses his family.

He realizes he needs them.

And so hat in hand he takes the next Greyhound bus all the way back

To his little Massachusetts home town,

Unsure if his parents will welcome him home because it has been over a year

Since he saw them and months since he called

*Where is he? His mom would wait up at night asking. Is he lost?*

*Is he okay?*

The son has to walk all the way from the bus stop to his home

– no money left, no cell phone –

And there in the distance he can see his dad's old green Volkswagon Jetta driving

Up the road, slow down, and from 100 yards off he sees it stop

And then he sees his dad open the door and then run as fast as a 63-yr.old man  
with bad knees can run,

straight into his son's arms.

*"We thought you were gone" the dad says.*

*"We thought maybe we lost you. But here you are...home! Alive!"*

And with this story of losing and finding in mind,

Let's ask our questions again:

*Have you or someone you loved ever been lost?*

*Have you or someone you loved ever been found?*

And so here we have it:

two children lost and found in a city park.

6 boys seeking their hiding friend in a St. Louis neighborhood.

1 lost son returning back home to the prodigal love,

as in crazy love, as in large an unconditional love of his parents.

I think of these stories and this morning

I am thinking of us and the hide and seek games we play –

Running off in our lives, like those girls,  
to discover, to learn, to explore, to find ourselves.

Or hiding, like Steve, from having to explain our deepest hurt to our friends,

To our ministers, to our teachers, to our families, to our colleagues.  
 Or desperately seeking, like the parents, for someone or something we love  
 to return us safe and whole despite the hurt caused,  
 despite the wounds, despite the scars.

Says Carl: *The story of lost and found is the oldest story in the world.  
 It is the story of Peek-a-Boo and the Blue Bird and Persephone.  
 And it is our story, too, because we all want to be found.*

Which leads me to the Good News;  
 (and please take note: whenever I say the phrase ‘Good News’ in a sermon,  
 That means Pay Attention, that means Breaking News, that’s the cell-phone  
 Equivalent of a loud chime telling you an important text has arrived).  
 Here’s the Good News:

The good news is that we belong to a religious tradition and community  
 That says everyone can be found - however lost, however broken,  
 However far away, however well hidden.  
 The game is not over until everyone is found.

And more than that  
 we believe the good news that what we’re creating here in our congregation  
 Is kind of like one big game of Sardines,  
 Where instead of hiding alone and by yourself  
 we go hide with you in your dark places and your light places  
 and wait with you there until we’re all found together.

And more than we believe the good news that we can begin a new game  
 That sometimes the days may be hard and the rules  
 May not seem in our favor,  
 But things can change, what’s hidden can be discovered  
 What’s lost can be found,  
 And life can start over.

And more than that we believe the good news that invites us to  
 Come out, Come Out Wherever You are.  
 In other words, we believe in inviting each other  
 To be whole people, no need to pretend,  
 No closets, no darkened rooms, no fake it until you make it,

No theology tests to decide whose in and whose out.

Because in this large game of Sardines,  
We hide together, we laugh together, we cry together,  
We celebrate together, we grieve together,  
We pray together, we doubt together, we fight together,  
We lose together, we find together,  
And we say over and over to a world full of people:  
You are alone, you are not alone, you are not alone,  
You are not alone, you are not alone.

We also sing together, so let us stand: Amazing Grace, #204.  
That says you don't have believe less or believe more  
When are we found?  
We're found when

Hiding, like Steve, from pain, from hurt, from the  
to learn who are, or what it means to hide from pain, or lose someone we love  
And another in ancient book many think has nothing relevant to say to us anymore,  
But they tell what Carl Scovel describes as the oldest story in the world:  
The story of lost and found.  
And here on this beautiful morning in March,  
when the world is opening back up to us  
and we are opening back up to the world,  
what I'm wondering is how this story is our story, too,  
we who in this room are in different ways and to different degrees  
are hiding and seeking,  
but all wanting to be found

Back up to us and we are coming back out of our homes

*You may be sitting there wondering: what's any of this got do with me?*

*How are these stories connected.*

*And this is how:*

And with this story of losing and finding in mind:

I'll ask our questions again:

*Have you ever been lost or worried you would lose another?*

*Have you ever found someone or been found yourself?*

You may be wondering: what's—

lost and found children in a city park.

Hiding and seeking boys in a St. Louis neighborhood,

Young man leaving and then returning home —

Happened in different times and places, but as Carl says

About his story, they all tell the oldest story in the world:

The story of lost and found.