

31 Sunday in Ordinary Time C 2016

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”

I want to share with you two senses of the word *lost*. This afternoon I was sitting in my office playing with my dad’s high school ring and it slipped from my hand. I heard it hit the mat on which my chair sits and poof, it was gone. I cannot find it. It’s in lost. Maybe it’s just a thing I have with rings. I lost my high school class ring when I was in college. The first sense of the word *lost* is to misplace something. Something is simply in the wrong place.

The second sense of the word *lost* is more dire. In this sense *lost* means to be destroyed or ruined. The house was lost in a fire. After hail, wind and rain, a farmer might conclude that the crop is a complete loss.

When we speak of people and their disposition toward God we never have the right to describe them as destroyed or ruined. Only God can make this judgment and so long as a person lives, conversion is possible.

The kid who drops out of school and falls victim to substance abuse; he may be lost but he is not lost. His is misplaced but he is not ruined.

The young lady who has a baby and continues to befriend the boy who dropped out of school and uses drugs; she may be lost but she is not lost. It is never our place to declare someone eternally doomed. We are not God, and I believe that God is far more companionate than are we.

Zacchaeus was a hateful man. Jericho was a wealthy tax district. Zacchaeus was at the top of his profession and, trust me, he was the most hated man in the district. His fellow citizens would have considered him a traitor and an extortionist.

In the gospel (19:1-10) Jesus indicates that “...the Son of man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” Despised and hated by men, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus—he was reaching for the love of God. This was enough for Jesus then and it is enough for him today. For the lost, anyone who is lost, if they can reach after the love of God, God’s love will be waiting.

Many people are lost. You and I, we can be in the wrong place. What we need is not unloving judgment but a firm and loving hand to show us the way. And when the lost are ready for the love of God, it is our calling to be love for them.

The Love of God is here for us every Eucharist—he is Jesus. Here we are not lost. Here we are in the right place.