

Baptism at St Luke's

15 September 2019

Reading: Luke 15:1-10

Faithful God, please open the meaning of the Bible to us in fresh and exciting way, in Jesus name.

It is wonderful to welcome Nathaniel into the family of God through his baptism. Today was made even more special for me when Bethany, his mum, told me that I had baptised her as a baby. It's always good to get repeat business - even if it did make me feel a bit old!

What are you like at finding things that are lost?

We have all had the experience of looking for something vital - the final piece of the jigsaw, the Allen key to complete the kitset furniture, the credit card to make the booking, the key to open the door. My recent frustration at home has been the registration for the trailer. Like all good men I look for things with my mouth not my eyes: "Rosemary, where's the registration for the trailer?" That worked!

In response to criticism by the Pharisees at his eating with so called sinners, Jesus tells two stories. Both are about searching for something that was lost. Both show the joy at finding.

One involved leaving 99 sheep while searching for the one lost sheep and the other involved a lost coin. Both stories involve women searching as shepherds were typically woman in Jesus day. Both involve a desperate search. Both involve overwhelming joy. In fact, the party the lost coin woman calls for would have cost more than the coin was worth. But Jesus is telling us about God's joy and as a faithful Jew he cannot utter God's name.

Yesterday I was searching around the Dress Mart Mall looking for jeans. Over the speakers was pumping out what I think is an anthem for our age. U2's 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For'. Despite all our advances in science and technology we still haven't found what we are looking for. One commentator put it like this; "Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire together with such non-material blessings as a happy family, and yet lead lives of quiet and at times noisy desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that

there is a hole inside them and that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it..... it aches, it aches....”

There are so many examples in our world of people searching in all the wrong places. If only there was a place where we could find lasting peace and satisfy the ache in our hearts.

The mighty Amazon river is 90 miles wide when it reaches the sea. And the fresh water from the river flows out for up to 200 miles into the ocean. In fact, the flow of the Amazon is so vast it is more than the combined flow of the Yangtze, the Mississippi and the Nile rivers together. Legend has it of a ship whose sailors were slowly dying of thirst sailing up the coast of South America and passing the mouth of the Amazon River. It wasn't until another ship signalled to them that they realised the life water they sought was right beneath them in that place.

Today we are thirsty and with Nathaniel we are dipping the buckets of our souls into the life-giving waters of baptism. The well of God's love never runs dry. You can dip your bucket once or a thousand times, God's love has no end.

Like me you might enjoy the Taizé style of worship - those haunting songs that leave your soul satisfied. Brother Alois the head of the Taizé community recently of the upsurge of people seeking Jesus in their lives. He travelled to China where a young man explained to him, “The Chinese soul has always believed in heaven. In recent years material life has improved but this has done nothing to meet the spiritual void and the search for meaning in life. More and more young people are turning to Jesus and the church. So many are coming that the welcomers at the cathedral can't keep up with demand.” The brothers gave a million Bibles to help meet this spiritual demand. The situation is repeated in Poland and the Philippines Brother Alois wrote.

Here in New Zealand many look for faith in things that have no lasting value. Many people I work with find it hard to believe that God loves them. Many find it hard to understand that the church is there for them. Many find it hard to realise that God's love is so easy to access.

“My boat is so small,” prayed St Columba of Iona, “My boat is small, and the ocean is so wide. Guide me home.” The legend goes that when Columba and his monks set out in a tiny boat adrift on the mighty Atlantic

in search of new people to share God's love with the monks kept asking, "Haven't we gone far enough Columba?" "No," he would say, "we can still see land. We need to go until we can only see the sea."

Today we set out afresh with Nathaniel. We are thirsty for waters of life, but we need only reach our hands into the sea of God's love to know joy, peace and love. Our searching is over, the mighty river of God's love is all around for those with eyes to see.

Loving God, Wellspring of Life,

Deep inside I feel a longing for you.

Grant an end to my searching

And to find there the joy that knows no end.

Through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen