

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, May 5, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

I was in a meeting with a few other local pastors last week, and there was a phrase that a couple of the pastors used that caught my attention - "the lost". They referred to "the lost" as people who are in need of guidance, who perhaps haven't yet found God, and the idea of lostness being a major sensation in one's life really stuck with me. I think many of us have felt lost from time to time in this past year, or really throughout the course of our lives, let's be honest, and I'd love to take some time to dive into what it means to be lost.

The feeling of being lost, to me, is the feeling of being vulnerable, perhaps in a way that is unexpected or unintentional. It's a feeling of needing guidance in some way or another, whether from internally discerning something, or needing directions from someone outside of yourself. If the lostness goes on for too long, if we're vulnerably exposed in that way for a long time, we start to get afraid, bitter, perhaps greedy or angry, because something tender has not yet been tended to.

The scripture for today's devotion is a single verse, but I want to present it with some context. This verse comes after a story of Jesus and a man named Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, one who had a lot of money, and seemed curious about Jesus, but was disliked by the people because of what appears to be some sinful and/or shady tax collecting practices. Once Zacchaeus encounters Jesus, he pledges to give half of his possessions to the poor, and promises that he will pay back people he has defrauded four times more than what he took away. He encounters Jesus and upon serving Him, providing Jesus with hospitality and conversation, Zacchaeus was moved to change his entire situation in order to follow the ways of Christ. And the single verse for today comes after Jesus supports Zacchaeus' promises and tangible actions. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

There are stories of people being lost to some degree or another throughout the scriptures, from Adam and Eve being lost without the known, abundant life and joy of the garden of Eden, all the way to John's revelations giving vision to what life in God, in the new life of Jesus could be for a new, fledgling church that didn't know when or how or if Jesus would actually return. There are plenty of stories of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, being free from enslavement in Egypt, working their way towards the land of milk and honey, and not knowing a ton of specifics in between, except that God was with them. God made a covenant, a deep, life-saving promise to be their God and the Israelites, our forebears in faith, will be God's people. And in the vulnerability of wilderness, of this sense of lostness, that covenant of God guided them. They tested the promise a bit, with the whole manna situation among others, but ultimately it was God who gave them life and guidance.

Jesus came to seek out and to save the lost. Jesus came to meet us in our vulnerable places and give us direction for how to move next, out of our sense of lostness. Zacchaeus abused his

power as a tax collector and influence as a wealthy person - indeed the people in his community called him out on his sins of greed and fraud in front of Jesus himself. In choosing Jesus, in choosing the Son of Man come to earth out of the great love of God, Zacchaeus found a new way of being. Zacchaeus boldly changed his ways, actionably changed his ways, to fully serve the people and Jesus instead of his own interests. A tangible action to follow Jesus and serve the people around him is what saved him from being lost.

And friends, if we are feeling lost, we can take some advice from Zacchaeus' story and actions - he welcomed Jesus more deeply into his life, beyond simply curiosity, and did a tangible thing to support his neighbors. He gave money to people he frauded out of it at 4 times the amount, and gave half of everything he had to the poor. How can we boldly serve our neighbors in need, the poor and the people who have systemically been frauded out of financial support? How can we repent from the things that sinfully serve ourselves and instead look to the ways of Jesus for guidance? And how can the people around us, the body of Christ, meet us in our vulnerability of being lost, and love us well to begin to heal and be whole again?

Friends, I'll repeat the scripture for today - "The Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost." I pray that you are met and well-loved in the vulnerability of your lost seasons. I pray you find Christ in ways that surprise you, and allow you to truly, tangibly love your fellow people. And I pray that God, revealed to us in the scriptures and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit here and now, will guide you into new life and love unending.

Please join me in prayer:

Lord God, our beloved creator and guide of all time and place, empower us to act in the ways you call us to, the ways of bold love for you and our neighbors. We pray to learn from Zacchaeus and Jesus, to right the wrongs we have perpetuated, and tangibly act on behalf of our fellow people. Help us to find you in the vulnerability of being lost, that you will meet us in our most tender, inmost parts, and show us that we are deeply loved by you. Help us to do what is right, help us to confess and repent when we have done wrong, and may we live in the ways of love in which you have commanded us. In the name of Jesus and united with the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

One quick note before we end today, dear friends - we are going to take a break from the Wednesday Word devotions for the summer, so next week, May 12, will be our last devotion for a while. These devotions may look different, or come back in different formats, or maybe not come back at all, depending on feedback I receive. So, if you have any feedback on these devotions, please feel free to call or text me at 715-396-1465 or email pastor.mtzionhudson@gmail.com - I'd love to hear your thoughts. Thanks so much for tuning in, and I pray you have a beautiful rest of your day. Amen.