

**Keep the Change**  
**September 12, 2010**

**Luke 15:1-10**

15:1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.

15:2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

15:3 So he told them this parable:

15:4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

15:5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

15:6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

15:7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

15:8 "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?

15:9 When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

15:10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

**Proclamation of the Word**

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When at a store, do you count your change?

Not loose bills neatly stacked. I am talking about the coins- do you count each one?

The loose dimes, nickels, pennies, you receive from the cashier along with your receipt?

Do you count them?

If you're like me, if it is a few pennies, I'd rather discard them in the little cup there to "share a penny, borrow a penny"

You know there has been a movement afoot to get rid of coins altogether.

In fact, I think with the price of copper, it costs the government more than a penny to make a penny!

So wouldn't that make sense?

One proposal suggests that stores just round up to the nearest dollar to simplify. I can understand that logic.

This is the cup where my family throws our loose change.

Filled with nickels, pennies, dimes and quarters...this is the discard jar.

Chuck's empties his pockets. The kids fish for change.  
I regularly discard my coins out of my wallet because they are just heavy  
and I want to lighten my load.  
Ironically, the weight of change has been replaced by all the reward/discount plastic  
cards from every store I frequent.  
Cards from Ingles, Rite Aid, CVS, Dick's Sporting Goods.  
Sometimes, we have a change rolling project and see how much all those loose coins add up to.  
They seem insignificant, even annoying to deal with  
until you roll them all up together and then they are valuable, it seems.  
I have one other place where I keep coins, these are the silver dollars.  
One per Christmas from the Great Grandma Eaker to the grandchildren.  
One which my grandmother gave me from my birth year.  
Maybe worth a little more than a dollar, but valuable because of their history.  
Same way with the half pence which rides around in my wallet.  
Not even a whole penny, just a half penny from England.  
Valuable because it rode around in my mother's wallet for years for good luck.

But all the other coins just, collect in that cup.  
They are dead weight.  
Not worth much...a nickel here, a penny found.  
In an era when our plastic credit cards are worth thousands of dollars in credit,  
getting excited over a penny seems out of date and archaic.

But Jesus paints us a picture-  
A picture of God as a woman, literally a "homemaker" (or housewife in Greek)  
who hunts down the flashlight  
Shines it into every nook and crannie,  
Sweeping under the sofa,  
Poking a broom handle or a yard stick under and behind the refrigerator-  
Frantically searching for one coin-  
A strange sight:  
Not behavior one expects from the Creator and President/CEO of the Universe.

It makes God look like a miser.

This is an unusual image of God for me...I get the search and rescue Shepherd image,  
but God as a homemaker,  
down on her knees,  
up to her eyeballs in dust bunnies, seeking out the lost coin?

Parables- the stories Jesus told are like that- they jar us until we see with new eyes.  
They are meant to tease our imaginations- plant seeds for new thoughts.  
They nudge us to look at life from a different point of view.  
To get down on the floor with a flashlight, looking in the dark corner for something lost.

Someone has said that myths are stories we tell to explain why the world is the way that it is,  
And parables are stories to suggest the possibility of  
A world quite different from the way it now is.

Jesus told parables to invite disciples to imagine  
What it really is like to live in the kingdom of God.  
And every once and a while our imaginations catch on,  
and we not only see that reality,  
we help create it, too.

Jesus tells these stories because he was eating with the not-so-respectable people,  
People with whom we would not want our children associating.  
The Pharisees and religious scholars were just disgusted and put out with Rabbi Jesus.

Who were these Pharisees and Scholars?  
They were good, law-abiding citizens.  
Respectable folks who more than went to church, they were leaders in the church.  
They were members of the Presbyterian Layman, Presbyterians for Renewal, Covenant Network,  
Presbyterians for the Care of Creation.  
They were members of the NRA and the Sierra Club.  
They were people standing on the side of truth as they saw it.

They were the righteous folks, who knew they were on the correct side-  
God's side- of the issues.  
They were the ones who could assess a person by their address, diplomas, job titles, checkbook,  
community service or military service,  
and know whether this was someone they should associate with  
or if this was a "sinner" that should be shunned.

When the Pharisees and scholars saw with whom Jesus was eating dinner,  
They could tell just by looking at them, that they were in the sinner category,  
They were concerned that Jesus just might invite them in to the next church supper,  
or even worse, to worship on Sunday.  
He heard their grumbling and murmuring, so he told these stories about  
the 100<sup>th</sup> sheep being sought out and brought home  
and the frantic search for the loose coin.  
What is most unusual about the story is not someone looking for something that was lost,  
It is the finder's response to finding the lost sheep and coin.

When the woman finds her coin, the missing piece, she jumps up a down, laughing.  
She rejoices!  
Then she invites her friends and neighbors over for a cookout,  
wanting all of them to celebrate with her!

That seems just a little over the top!  
The next you find a quarter in the sofa cushions,  
are you going to call all your friends and neighbors over for a party?

But Jesus says, that is what God is like.  
This is the God we worship and serve-  
A searching, seeking until she finds us, throw down party kind-of-God.  
From God's eyes- every single person, or creature for that matter, is precious!

There is no such thing as loose change that annoys and weigh down;  
There is no acceptable margin of loss.  
Every single coin, even the penny, matters to God Almighty.

God is determined with flashlight and broom in hand, to find, until the last penny is found.  
Every time someone slips into the cracks or the sofa cushion,  
God is searching.  
And when God finds the one who has slipped away, oh, there will be a party!  
We might think of the coin as an irrelevant and annoying.  
To God it is worth keeping.  
In fact, God acts like she has won the lottery when she finds it!

But God doesn't do a little touch down dance on her own; she wants the whole team,  
and all the crowd to celebrate with her!  
Music blasting, jumping in the stands, high-fiving kind of celebrating.  
When the little coin gets dropped into the coin jar, all the other coins jingle with joy!

We know the world doesn't always work that way.  
I have been the resentful righteous, looking down my nose,  
Focusing on another's fault, rather than the faithful tenacity  
of the God of the universe who will not let anyone of us go!  
I have treated others like they were loose change.  
I know that it breaks God's heart.  
And other times maybe you and I have felt like the lost coin, sitting in a dark corner,  
out of sight, forgotten, afraid.  
Sometimes we get comfortable there and don't even realize that we are lost.

But Jesus says it does not have to be that way. God intends that God's children live differently.  
And with flashlight and broom in hand, God is determined that it will not stay that way.

I think God has a hobby. God is a coin collector.  
God always keeps the change!  
Instead of tucking them away in a Safe Deposit Box at the bank,  
I think God likes to throw them into a big coin jar,  
To hear the sound and jingle of a new coin added to the bunch  
Never dividing them up into denominations according to their face value.

God wants the coins to rub together and make a musical sound.

And if the coins get dumped out and a few roll away under the bed or into a dark corner,  
God never says, well I have plenty more,  
God searches for each little lost one.

I think the next time I pay with cash at the store; I won't say keep the change.  
I'll throw those coins into my wallet, then my coin jar,  
share them with the children, enjoy them...  
maybe we'll save them for a big party where we can invite others to join in on the joy that God  
offers.

Rather than be righteous and resentful like the Pharisees and Scholars,  
I'd rather go to the party where I can meet the God who  
Like that housewife, with broom and flashlight in hand,  
searches until each coin is back where it belongs with all the other coins.  
Until they all know that each and everyone is priceless.

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Many thanks to the Revs. Mary Jane Cornell and Lib McGregor Simmons for some of the content of this sermon. I am grateful to be thrown in the coin jar with these wonderful ministers.