

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time: Lost in a Crowd, Found in Christ

Have you ever felt lost? I don't mean lost on a car trip, or lost on a hike, but lost in life. Maybe there are a lot of people around you, but you still feel lost. A Mom can have a big family, but can still feel lost. Her day is filled with the chatter of children. She loves them, but she sees herself as defined as the car driver, the diaper changer, the feeder, the cleaner. She still feels lost. "Who am I?" she might be asking.

A high school student might also feel very much lost in a very large crowd. He, she, might go from class to class, assembly to assembly and get to where he is supposed to be, but he still feels lost. "I'm just a number to the administration of the school. I'm in the middle of a huge number of kids, but I am hardly noticed."

When people enter the job force, it often takes them quite a while to find their place in society. Many young people are still trying to find themselves. Everyone goes through stages of life when he or she feels lost. And this does not just refer to the young. A widow or widower who is a senior citizen feels lost when his or her spouse dies.

We might feel lost because we are in a new situation in life, like school, and are looking for our individuality in a crowd. We might feel lost because we just feel like a functionary in our job or even our homes. We might feel lost because life has forced us to take a huge change in direction due to sickness or death. These feelings are really normal, part of life. What is not normal, or at least not meant to be normal, is when we are separated from the reason for our existence. When we are separated from Christ, we are really lost. So, we do this or that to fill our days. We join in with the crowd and do the things that are expected of an immoral or at least an amoral person. And we lose contact with the reason for our being. We lose contact with Jesus Christ.

We go to the place we know we should not be. We are with the person that we know we should not be with. We do what we should not do, because it feels good, or because everyone else is doing it and we want to fit in. "No one is going to tell me what is right or wrong," we claim, including in that "no one" is that voice within us called conscience. We choose immorality. Or we refuse to stand up for what is right. We refuse to proclaim our Christianity with our lives. We say we will not make a decision on whether an action is right or wrong. We are too politically correct for that. We become amoral. We do not allow morality to become a factor in our judgment. And the results of being amoral is that we lose ourselves in a crowd of humanity. We lose contact with Christ.

Zacchaeus, the little tax collector of today's Gospel was lost. He was rejected by his own people for cashing in on the Roman occupation and collecting taxes for the enemy, keeping an ample amount for himself. He hid behind his riches. But he was a lost soul. And then one day he heard a crowd coming. They were there to greet this Jesus, this Messiah. Zacchaeus was initially nothing more than curious. He climbed a tree to get a glimpse of the great man. But then Jesus stopped under the tree and

called him. The Good Shepherd found the lost sheep. Zacchaeus came down from the tree and pledged himself to God. "Half of my belonging I give to the poor. If I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay him back four fold."

"Today, Zacchaeus, salvation has come to this house."

Zacchaeus was lost no longer. Jesus had found him, and he responded. He now found himself in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps some of us have had times that we have been lost. We go to Church every week, and that is a very good thing. But sometimes we are just going through the motions. We stand and sit and kneel and sing. The hardest times for us are often the quiet times. That is a sure sign that something is very wrong. It is hard to hide non-Christian behavior when it is only ourselves and the Lord. Those are the times when our consciences are telling us: I'm lost. Maybe, I shouldn't even be here.

But we are here. We are in Church. Perhaps when we walked through the doors of the Church we have taken the first step to see who this Jesus is. Walking through the doors of the Church is, for many, like climbing the sycamore tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. We certainly don't expect Jesus to single us out from the crowd of worshipers. But he does. He stands under the tree that every single person has climbed in his life, the tree that many of us are still looking down from, and he says, "Judy, Frank, Shirley, Bill, Zacchaeus, come down from there. I want to stay in your house tonight and from now on."

Now, we are faced with what is really an easy decision: do we want Him in our house? It is going to cost us. We are going to have to abandon that which has no place in our house, in our lives. But it is an easy decision. Nothing can surpass the all encompassing joy of having Jesus in our lives.

We may have been lost in a crowd. But he searched for us and called to us. And we responded. And we have found ourselves in Jesus Christ.

Amazing Grace!