



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Being Found
The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 11, 2022
The Rev. Paul McLain

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Twenty-one years ago today, Stuart Hoke remembers going into work that morning as an associate priest to The Reverend Dan Matthews, rector of Trinity Church on Wall Street at the time, right next door to the World Trade Center in New York. Stuart took the subway as he always did, but something unusual happened at his stop around 8:40. The conductor in a loud and gruff voice said, "Get off the train now!" Stuart didn't know what was up, but he did as he was told and proceeded to get off the train. Then, as the conductor learned more information, he announced, "Get back on the train!" Stuart stopped in his tracks and returned to his seat. Many who left the trains walked right into the initial explosions and debris as the planes hit the North and South Towers, and died. Stuart credits the conductor's perseverance in making that second announcement with saving his life.

It was one of the first of many instances that day in which he was the recipient of the ministry of someone else. Those moments of first getting off the train, then getting back on the train, set the tone for the rest of his day. He moved quickly from moment to moment, often not knowing if he was going or coming, helping or being helped, found or lost.

That is how we have felt this week. We heard of the abduction of Liza, a child of Calvary. We prayed fervently for her safe return over the weekend. We were crushed by the news of her tragic death. Then the next day, as we're all still reeling, we heard the news of a shooting rampage in real time. We feared for our own safety and that of those we love. And we grieve for Dewayne, Allison, Corteria, and all who died at the hand of violence in our city, and pray for the recovery of those injured. We felt and still feel disoriented, on edge, lost.

In the Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin we hear in today's Gospel of Luke, we want to join the 99 sheep, safely over in the green pastures near clear, cool waters. Or we want to identify with the 9 coins, finding ourselves safely tucked into the woman's purse. We may also romanticize about being the heroes – the shepherd out searching for the one lost sheep, the woman diligently seeking her one lost coin. But we rarely want to see ourselves or much less be the lost sheep or the lost coin.

To be lost is to be not in control, to be disoriented, to be vulnerable. Even in our spiritual journeys, we often use the language of the hero's quest. In our prayers and practices, we set out to find meaning, find wholeness, find God. And there are times when it is helpful and useful for us to be in the mode of seekers and searchers. Yet, in the irony of ironies, it's when we let go of

grasping for the hero's quest and admit our doubts, our fears, our sins, our angers, our hurts, our heartaches – that's when we're *found by God*.

When Stuart Hoke did leave the subway that fateful Tuesday morning in New York, a real estate executive who knew him shook him and said, "Run for your life!" Stuart made it to a basement of the Stock Exchange, and eventually got to Trinity Wall Street. There, his rector Dan Matthews let him know people were coming into the chapel, seeking sanctuary. He told Stuart to go there and do something with them. Stuart and an organist went there and began a spontaneous worship service, more as a means of crowd control than anything else. The organist played reassuring hymns like "Rock of Ages" and "O God, our help in ages past." Stuart asked him to play "Nearer, My God to Thee." A man shouted, "No, not that one." And Stuart remembered that was the hymn that the crew and passengers joined in holding hands and sang as the Titanic sank. Not a good hymn for that day.

Stuart then read the Prayer for Quiet Confidence from our Prayer Book: 'O God of peace, who hast taught us in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Instead of the expected response of 'Amen,' a man shouted out, 'Do it again!' After a week like this, I think we're all with that man. That is a prayer worth repeating.

Eventually, a policewoman arrived and told the group they needed to evacuate. The organist told Stuart, 'We need to get out of here now!' Stuart remembered that there were 150 children in the church's day care program in the basement. Most of their parents worked at the World Trade Center. He joined Dan Matthews in leading their flock to join the throngs of thousands of people, hoping to catch the Staten Island Ferry to safety. But everything was bottlenecked. A bus driver spotted the group, found Stuart, and offered to drive the children and teachers to St. Rose of Lima Church, a church on the other side of town in Washington Heights.

A volunteer saw Stuart, now covered in dust and soot, and asked if he needed a bottle of water or anything else. Stuart asked, 'Can you just tell me what's happening?' And to the best of her ability, she answered. Stuart and the flock eventually made their way to Staten Island. He was able to find out that the day school children were all safe and being reconnected to their families. He reached his son, who lived near the Pentagon in D.C. They could hardly speak words to each other. They simply cried together.

When Stuart finally made it home the next morning, on the steps leading to his building waiting patiently for him to arrive home were six members of his recovery group. Stuart has been and is a leader in the recovery movement, and has supported those efforts here at Calvary and around the world. Much like the rejoicing and welcome over the return of the one lost coin, the one lost sheep, Stuart felt the rejoicing and welcome home from those he had seen at their lowest points, and those who had seen him at his lowest points. But they had been taught something that stayed with them. When any one of them was lost, they were all lost together. In fact, it was at their lowest points, when they were most lost, that they *together* were found by God as they were found by each other.

God found Stuart throughout that long day of 9/11.
God found him through a subway conductor,
a real estate executive,
a couple of men who were raw and honest during worship,
a policewoman,
an organist,
a bus driver,
a volunteer,
a shaken son,
and six members of his recovery group.

No matter how lost we feel, God is finding us at the end of this long week, as we together open our hearts to being found. *Amen.*