

September 11, 2016 17th Sunday after Pentecost
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Exodus 32:7-14, Psalm 51:1-10
1 Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-10

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Let us pray... May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts... Amen.

Grace and peace to you, from our Savior of Mercy and Love.

Our youngest daughter is nearly three and a big fan of playing the old classic: Hide and Seek.

She seems unfazed by the limited number of hiding spots on our main floor.

Don't tell, but more often than not she resorts to her current favorite hiding place, next to the back door, atop a mess of discarded shoes, right behind a coat rack bulky with rain jackets and sweat shirts.

You can picture this, can't you, a short child, hidden behind a veil of jackets, just a few inches of her legs showing, trying her best to wait patiently to be found?

Ready or not, here I come, someone sings out, and there she is, about to burst from her spot to play again.

The line that has haunted me all week was from Monday's Star Tribune, a quote from Robert Meyer, a Paynesville neighbor near where Jacob's body was buried for all these 27 years.

"[He, Jacob] He's been right there the whole time." He has been right there the whole time.

We're in a two-week stretch of readings from Luke's gospel that offer an arc of sorts.

Last week it was about counting the cost of discipleship, setting down our culture's priorities—possessions, status, sometimes even family—in order to carry the cross. Are we all in? we asked.

This week it's not so much about setting things down, but rather, being found, and we have a chance to wonder together about what it means to be found by our gracious Savior right where we are?

Ready or not, here I come.

The tax collectors and sinners were leaning in to listen, hungry, yearning; the Pharisees were grumbling.

And then Jesus, in Jesus fashion, ready or not, tells a parable, actually two parables, about being found.

There's the one where the shepherd dares leave all 99 sheep to go after the one

who has wandered a little too far, or gotten caught up in the bramble.

And there's the one about the woman down on her knees, scouring the dusty shadows, not ready to let even one precious coin be lost.

Ready or not, here I come, Jesus calls out: and the shepherd finds that sheep and rejoices, and the woman, rises from the floor on creaky legs, shiny coin held tightly in triumph.

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco is known for its rich art and worship life.

At St. Gregory, the Communion table in the midst of the congregation is etched in Greek with these words, actually the grumbling Pharisee's words: "He welcomes sinners and eats with them."

There are so many nice words about Communion, about Jesus' welcome, and this particular line is a rarity. It's rare, for we don't often quote those grumbling Pharisees,

And, quite frankly, it's rare for we don't always admit overtly to being lost, to being hungry sinners.

There is a freedom in that space and around that table—a freedom to show up, to admit our yearning to be found again by our Savior in the circle of others with a need as great as our own.

And it's interesting, isn't it that those words are written in Greek?

Oh, I know, that's the language of the New Testament, of Jesus' time, but it's not the language of the people of San Francisco, the folks who wander in randomly from the street on any given Sunday, or the regulars who have uttered their prayers and praise in that sacred space for generations.

So a line like that, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them," must be owned by a congregation, explained to one another with an open truth: that we confess to being lost—all of us, even when we try to look all put together—and that it's our Savior who finds us, and brings us again and again to the table.

Ready or not, here I come.

Here I come, Jesus calls, into the midst of the first weeks of classes and the intensity of settling in and making community when maybe we're are feeling utterly alone or overwhelmed.

Here I come, when life is good and rich and we're tempted to forget the one who gives this very life.

Here I come, Jesus cries, when a diagnosis isn't good, when the pain just keeps going, when we're tired of being tired.

Here I come, Jesus weeps, when towers have fallen, and people are courageous, and loved ones don't come home, and our nation's mentality shifts in a moment.

Ready or not, here I come, Jesus says: I'll search you out and find you.

I love you, and I love this world and I won't let you go, in life, in death, in life beyond death, you are that precious, this world is that precious—I won't let you go, Jesus says, I won't let you go.

Here I come, Jesus calls, here I come, into this this community of the beloved, into this community stretching by the week, as new folks find a place and those who have long made this their table, widen the circle—Here I come, ready or not, here I come.

Across the ELCA, across our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, congregations this morning are celebrating a Sunday designated as: **God's Work, Our Hands**, doing all sorts of projects.

Take a look at your hands....

If you are near someone else, look at their hands, too, the rough spots, the calluses.

Here at Hope we're celebrating this Sunday not by doing more projects, but by remembering that so often

God's work is accomplished by our very hands—arthritic or strong or shaky, young or worn.

It's God's work in our hands.

Every Sunday when young people gather, when music rings out, when questions are uttered, when parents find words to say "this is what we do as faithful community, this is why I come to church not just because it's Sunday, but because I need this on Monday," it's God's work in our hands.

Last Sunday as we welcomed a lovely yard full of students and neighbors, with music and bike tune ups, flowers and a food truck, it was God's Work in our hands.

Tonight and every night this week as families, parents and their kids, slip into bed, fed and safe, right here in our building, as we host Families Moving Forward, it's God work we're doing with our very hands.

I called one of you this week with a question about something or the other.

As we do, I asked how are you? And you replied, "Fine," and then you paused, and thought better of yourself and you said, "No really, I'm not fine, I've been reading the newspaper, and it's enough to make me cry, and I'm not fine, nothing seems fine."

Into this reality, Jesus cries out: ready or not, here I come.

Here I come to find you, and Jacob, and all the rest.

Here I come when grief overwhelms, or when our sin seems impossible, or when our hearts are breaking.

Here I come to welcome you again to this table of love and mercy and forgiveness and justice.

Here I come so that you can be God's hands, Christ's body, right here, right now, ready or not, here I come.

Amen.