



Finding Our Coin



The Collect

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The First Reading *Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28*

At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse-- a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

"For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good."



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All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta

Rev. Dr. Simon Mainwaring

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.
For thus says the Lord:
The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.
Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

The Epistle *1 Timothy 1:12-17*

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel *Luke 15:1-10*

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "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? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 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.' 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.

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

May I introduce you to Roger Pasquier. According to the *New Yorker*, Roger is an 'elite money hunter'. Ideal for any upper-east side Manhattan school's PTA spare change drive, but a disaster of a partner if you want to take a stroll in Central Park. Roger collects coins. Between 1987 and 2014, Roger retrieved one thousand nine hundred and twenty dollars, eighty-seven cents, in coins dropped on the sidewalk by unsuspecting NYC visitors and residents. From 1987 to 2006, he averaged about fifty-eight dollars a year. Since then, which is also since the introduction of the i-Phone and the devices that followed it left a multitude of New Yorkers glued to their smartphone screens, Pasquier's sidewalk take has nearly doubled. There's a parable there all of its own.



Now it takes a certain kind of man to amass those sort of numbers, and let me tell you, Roger is one of them. His top two tips for finding your way to fortune via the sidewalk's spare change collection are simple enough for any of us to deploy ourselves. First, never be happy. Good spirits, Pasquier says, are a liability. "When you're happy, you tend to look up, not down," he says. "It takes a lot of will power to focus when you're in a cheerful mood." As an aside for your own working life, then, should you be concerned that your performance is slipping, just think unhappy thoughts and things should slowly get better. Pasquier's second core strategy is one which I'm fairly sure he shares with many New Yorkers: avoid eye contact with other pedestrians. He says with characteristic poetry: "It's important that I keep my eyes on where the money is."

'Keep your eyes on where the money is', not uncommon advice is it. We hear it a lot. Perhaps Roger Pasquier is on to something. A couple of years back, a Bloomberg report estimated that Americans throw an estimated \$62 million in coins into the trash each year, or lose them behind the sofa, or sweep them off restaurant tables. \$62 million worth.



Roger Pasquier is just being a good citizen, it would seem, making a small dent in this annual exodus of currency from the US economy.

At first glance, the story that Jesus tells in our gospel reading today of the woman who loses one of her ten silver coins seems very much akin to our friend Mr Pasquier. She also is trying to keep her eyes on where the money is. She knows the techniques too. Like the eyes that remain fixed downward on the sidewalk, the woman in the gospel lights a lamp so she can look down into the cracks and crevices in the floor, sweeping away any other distractions in the home, in order to find her lost coin. While it is a clear difference between the two that the woman is looking for a coin of her own she has misplaced and our friend in Manhattan is looking for other people's coins, the same message might be derived from both tales: that we should look after our money.



In church life, we might call this the practice of good stewardship. As we launch our annual canvass today, it is worth noting that one of the principles we always seek to adhere to here in this church's life is that we to look after your money; to practice diligent and careful stewardship of the financial resource you entrust to us. All Saints' has an incredibly talented and committed group of people who year by year work tremendously hard to be prudent and attentive in honoring your generosity in how they prepare budgets for and carefully manage the expenditure of the financial resources your generosity makes available in this place. It is a good and faithful thing, and we are profoundly grateful for all of those among us who carry out this work. Our money is in very good hands.

All that said, this is Jesus who is telling this story, and we know, therefore, that there's more to this scene than the coins: we are not only to be faithful in our stewardship of what we have, we must also be attentive to what our relationship is to the financial means of our life.



The pivotal difference between the ancient tale of the woman who loses a coin and the modern day parable of Roger Pasquier's one coin at a time monetary cleaning of the streets and gutters of Manhattan, is where the eyes are set. Given his tally per year and the sheer longevity of his coin collecting, Roger Pasquier has spent much more time than I care to estimate looking down, avoiding the gaze of others, not letting happy thoughts distract his steely focus on the cash on the floor.

I wonder if there have been times in your own life when this has been the case for you? Our modern day relationship to money is highly complex and more often than not, highly convoluted. Just take debt. American household debt hit a record \$13.21 trillion last year. According to the Survey of Consumer Finances, which the Federal Reserve conducts every three years, my own age bracket of 45 - 55 share the distinction of having more household debt than any other group, on average about \$135,000. To the Millennials and Generation Z's in the room, there's something to look forward; and to those who are my seniors here, especially



the over 65's for whom average levels of debt take a sharp decline, remember us in your prayers.

In seriousness, though, debt is something we should pray about. You're probably aware of the statistic that is so startling to say out loud in the world's most generative economy, especially when for some the economy today yields such handsome rewards, that year by year somewhere around a staggering 60% of Americans don't have enough cash to cover an unexpected \$500 expense. And when you ask what kind of cost let's say an unanticipated medical bill might be - averaging about \$2700 - it is not hard to see how for many people in this country the cascading events that can lead to losing a home are only a handful of paychecks away.

Keeping our eyes on where the money is for so many is not a pastime but a necessity, and one that does direct the gaze downward. We should pray about that. We should talk about that. And I can say from personal experience, when in my earliest post-college years where I found it very hard to get out of the spiral of credit and debt, indebtedness has a



profound impact on the psyche. Every visit to the bank felt like I was going to see the school principal, and not to discuss my great report card. Every pay period saw me get really good at holding my breath to see if Peter had enough to pay Paul. Debt is pernicious in its growth into almost every area of our financial and spiritual lives. We should lament it. We should seek to change its grip on our nation's life. And we should look to places like this one, to help us tell another story about money.

And so to Jesus, and his wily story of the woman and her lost coin. The salutary feature in the tale is not the search for the money, but everything that comes after that. Come neighbors and friends, *'Rejoice with me, for I have found... [what] I had lost.'* There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, the gospel says, over just one life that discovers grace in their life, just as there is joy and thanksgiving for the woman who in finding her coin, takes her eyes off the money and onto what has always mattered more: the people who make life alongside her.



At its most rudimentary, that is the gospel lesson for us this morning, no matter our personal economic circumstances: keep your eyes off the money and on the people. Keep your eyes on the relationships, on the loves and longings of your life expressed in the living treasures that surround you every day. Raise your eyes from the sidewalk, and meet the gaze of happiness and sadness in the eyes of the other.

We give together in this place out of love for one another, for the relationships that bind this church together, indeed for the life we share with one another that makes this place a church. Our generosity in this parish, which is so deep and wide, is an expression of what is already received: the profound and faithful love that I see you share with one another in countless ways. There is no transaction, no exchange of products and services for your purchase, no return on investment, because these are gifts of gratuitousness, the exchange of love is already a given, the entrance of money onto the scene is purely an act of free will. And what a beautiful arrangement that is.



Society needs churches that are astoundingly generous and utterly spendthrift in their generosity so we might come to see what is possible in the web of human relationship when our generosity joins with others. Here, lives are transformed by God's boundless capacity for grace because this abundant feast of generous living has curated a space for such life-change to happen. This is not an institution that has a lot, it is a community of faith that has a lot to give away, not first our financial resources but first ourselves. For in the Way of Jesus, the gift of self precedes any other, and I see you give that gift away over and over again.

The Guild of the Good Shepherd, opening hearts of love to families and friends in the middle hours of their grief and loss. Volunteers who furnish the homes and refugees they have welcomed into this country at Hartsfield Jackson, and then swim with their children, and sit alongside them as tutors and advocates and above all as companions of love in Christ. Musicians and artists, designers and engineers, teachers and yes, because this is All Saints', lawyers, stepping out of the day job, over and over again, to help this church be the change we seek to see in our world in so



many lives offering the first fruits of their hearts because we know that the gift God wishes for all of us to give is the one that is most present to give away: the Love that spoke our life into being in the first place. With every time this happens, with every person that dares to love like Jesus, the possibility of change, of a better life for all that keeps its eyes off the money and on the people, is made more real, and each of our pledges of commitment to this church and these people is merely an expression of that abiding truth.

We have the opportunity today and tomorrow to sing a new church into being and a new way of seeing and living in the world around us. I invite you to make your pledge to All Saints', trusting that in the end, all that we might seek to do and be here on this block is God's work. We know that we are blessed in this life to be a blessing in as many, extravagant ways that life can offer us. Keep your eyes where God's eyes are: on you, and me, and every living soul, who radiates a divine beauty, made for glory, fashioned by grace, lives that we are called to love til that love brings us all home. Praise God for you, love's indescribable gift.