***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

Romans 5:1-5, 20-21 Rev. Tyler Amundson April 25, 2021

***Should I Buy a Device to Track My Keys?***

I don’t know if you know this, but just this week Apple came out with a device you can put on your keys, so you can use your phone to find them. As usually they took an idea already out there and made it fancy. A company named Tile did this about 4 years ago. The whole premise is if you can’t find your keys, you just use your phone to find them. You open the app, click on your keys and it will tell you where they are and your proximity to them.

Which leaves me wondering, “Is it time for me to buy a device to track my keys?”

My dad was in town the other day, and was teasing me because I never have trouble finding my phone, but I put my keys all over the house. Every time before I try to leave the house I am looking for my wallet or my keys, because even though there is a place for them, I always put them somewhere else. So I wonder if it is time for me to get an item to track these things for me.

Or is there something about the mundane part of losing my keys that I should consider, maybe there is a spiritual practice I would lose if I bought a tracking device.

The author Tish Harison Warren shares some stages she goes through on the hunt after she loses her keys, I think they are fairly accurate to my own experience.

1. Stage 1 – Logic – Retracing Steps
2. Stage 2 – Self-Condemnation – Self-Flagellation
3. Stage 3 – Vexation – Frustration and cursing
4. Stage 4 – Desperation -Emotional Upheavel
5. Stage 5 – Last-Ditch – Stopping and Praying
6. Stage 6 – Despair – Giving Up

What I find interesting and Warren does too is that this is probably the same process we go through during a spiritual crisis. It is a bit apolcolyptic. Warren says it this way,

“Apocalypse literally means an unveiling or uncovering. In my anger, grumbling, self-berating, cursing, doubt, and despair, I glimpsed for a few minutes, how tightly I cling to control and how little control I actually have. An in the absence of control, feeling stuck and stressed, those parts of me that I prefer to keep hidden were momentarily unveiled.” (Warren, pg. 52)

Now you might be thinking, “Hold on Tyler, we should just make a new rule to solve you from ever facing this problem again. Put your keys on the nice key hanger that your wife Crystal made for the back door.”

You might be right, but did you listen to our scripture today. Now, I am not saving I can’t save time by being more organized. In fact after I preach this sermon I can guarantee for at least a week, the keys will be in the right place. However, Romans said, “But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”

So, I need to be honest. It is ok to get better and more efficient at some things in life. However, to be truly human and to be a child of God, we have to learn to trust our faults. Losing our keys will happen, and it is not always a sign that you are stuck somewhere. Also, be warry of religion that just solves your problems with a quick answer, because legalism leads to amplification of failure.

Jesus, was in the business of pointing out that our failures are not always failures. Sometimes they are the gift for us to see the world differently. He did this by doing things at times, the most religious authorities considered to be the wrong time to do good deeds, or healing blindness with things like spit and mud. Going against all common sense, to remind us that God’s grace goes against all common sense.

A religion scholar named Bruxy Cavey put it this way,

“We can make a rule that says all Christians should avoid red chairs.” He must have known our church well. “That rule could be made because it could be thought that red chairs make us turn from our path with God.” The next generation may hear this and take it to the next extreme, “We need to build a fence around all red chairs.” And the next generation, “We should burn all red chairs because they keep us from God.”

But we may find out that one-time, a person got a red chair, sat in it and figured out where their keys were, or got some other inspiration from God. Bruxy Cavey’s point is that Jesus came to fulfill the law, by stripping it down to one principle, love. If a law is not about a relationship with a God who considers us all beloved, or about how we care for ourselves and others, then it is not helpful to God’s kingdom.

In other words, just when you need to buy something to find your keys, consider whether it is a spiritual exercise. Maybe if you don’t buy that thing, your wife will make a beautiful key hanger that goes by your back door, which, for us, in 2020 became a mask hanger, and we also use to help us plan the evening meals we have. I don’t need a key tracker, I need to be responsible sometimes and place my keys by the backdoor on the thing Crystal made, and ask for help when I don’t.

There is a story that goes this way:

*A visitor to the Australian outback visited a cattle ranch. He was intrigued by the seemingly endless miles of ranching country with no sign of any fences. He asked the rancher how kept track of his cattle. The rancher replied, “Out here we dig wells instead of fences.”*

*“Out here we dig wells instead of fences.” The implications of the phrase in our work as a church are significant.*

When we make mistakes, when we feel like we have gone far from God, look for the well of life or ask for help.

That same scholar, Cavey, also expounded, “Christians may have gotten it wrong when they started just reading the 23rd Psalm at funerals and memorials. Walking beside still waters to restore our souls is meant to be an ongoing process.”

Psalm 23

King James Version

**23**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

**2**He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

**3**He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

**4**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

**5**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

**6**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

What we need to learn from losing our keys, and the reminder from the apocalyptic process is that God calls us back to Godself, the well of life and love. It is our choice whether we stay stuck when we do something wrong or something that gets us stuck, like losing our keys. Jesus came to remind us that all fences are down, that we can walk by still waters in any everyday moment, and our souls can be restored.

I find it interesting for me, that when I lose my keys and I get to despair. The first thing that happens when I ask someone else for help, is that most times they start the list over with me. “Have you retraced your steps.”

I often think, “Hell yes I have, do you think I am totally inept.”

However, if I do it. Most of the times, when I ask for just that piece of help. I find my keys.

This week I invite you to do a little breath prayer.

Perhaps as you get your keys in the morning,

Breath in as you pick up your keys,

“God of Grace”

And as you breathe out,

“Find me this day.”

Practice with me,

Breathe in,

“God of Grace”

Breathe out.

“Find me this day.”

Shalom and Amen, my fellow key losers, and mistake makers.