

“Lost and Found at The Triennium”
Matthew 14: 23-33; Luke 15:1-3, 8b-10; Luke 19:1-10

Matt Matthews, Rachel Matthews, Mindy Watts-Ellis
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This sermon includes two film links found here:

<http://firstpres.church/PYT2019>
<https://presbyterianyouthtriennium.org/2019-pyt-promotional-video/>

Lost and Found at Triennium/Introduction Matt Matthews

The Presbyterian Youth Triennium is a gathering for high school age youth from the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church that occurs every three years. Some 5,000 youth and their leaders converge on Perdue University for a five-day spiritual high. Our church sent eight teenagers and three adults. We connected with 30-plus others from our presbytery that made up our “delegation.”

The church is called to faith formation with and for children and youth—indeed with people of all ages. This experience is a powerhouse event, and it is rare.

Rachel, Mindy, and I hope to share three brief snippets of the conference with you about being lost and found at Triennium. (Mindy has film highlights, and our youth have a word for you, too.)

This sermon should take no more than three hours.

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Listen for the word of the Lord:

Matthew 14: 23-33

When evening came, [Jesus] was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, [d] for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Two young people acted out this story in an impromptu play in our small group. A pastor named Murph from Washington state served as the impromptu director. I’ve seen pictures of this story before, but I’ve never seen this story portrayed quite like this.

“Peter” was a 13-year-old girl from New Jersey. “Jesus” was a 14-year-old boy who attended Licking Heights High School, in Ohio.

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

Murph prompted the girl who played Peter: *“Get out of the boat. Walk on water!”*

Reluctantly, carefully, she walked on the water. The floor tiles were believable waves.

But when [Peter] noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Murph prompted the girl who played Peter: *“Sink!”* And she sank in slow motion to the floor.

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Murph prompted the 14-year-old Jesus. *“Grab Peter! He’s sinking.”*

This awkward teenage boy who played Jesus reached out to the awkward teenage girl who played Peter. He pulled her up, and she fell back into his arms, smiling. For a long moment they held this pose. She wore relief in her face. Her body relaxed against his.

For his part, the boy was the unassuming, but capable, Lord of the cosmos. He held her and she relished being held, and there was nothing awkward, or forced, or out of place. It was as right as rain. She was safe in the savior’s arms.

I saw Jesus’ face in the 14-year-old boy. I saw Peter’s face in the 13-year-old girl. Right before our eyes, Jesus was holding Peter.

I blinked and saw another scene.

Jesus was holding me, and you, and everyone else who ever stepped foot onto restless seas and began to sink. We are going down and under, and Jesus grabs our reaching arms and pulls us to himself.

Thank God that in Jesus Christ, God’s got the whole world in his hands.

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Lost and Found at Small Group/Rachel Matthews

Luke 15:1-3, 8b-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: . . . what woman having ten silver coins,[a] if he 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."

There is so much to Triennium. It is hard to describe. Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN becomes Presbyterian land for four days: A giant worship experience, a quiet but energetic prayer room, an informative exhibit hall, wow interest groups, crazy dining halls, more Presbyterian colleges than you knew existed, delegation groups, and small groups. If you zoomed into campus from above each morning, you would see a stream of people coming out of dorms and dining halls across campus and flow into classrooms and under shade trees and into hundreds of nooks and crannies.

Small groups: the heart of the Triennium experience. These little small groups of about twenty youth and adult advisors only met three times. But, it is here that the conference slows down for in-depth friend making and God seeking. A small group leader guides the group through a close up view of the daily scripture that the worship, preaching and overall theme is based on.

Each person from each Presbytery gets assigned to a different small group. This means that all the Presbyteries get to meet people from all the other presbyteries across the nation and all across the world. Each person has one place where they can go from being "an unknown" to being "known," if they so choose to open themselves to it, and in the process have a more intimate and understandable sense of God's presence in their life. We Presbyterians like understanding.

What I found in small group gives me hope that God's Spirit is still alive in our world. Nobody is propped up by their back home friends in these groups. Each youth and adult is as they are, as God sees them. At first the get-to-know-you activities and affirmations seem a little contrived. For example, the first day at the end of an hour the leader had us write an affirmation about the person next to us. A very smart and confident young lady in my little circle laughed and said, "Yes, this is the part where we say something affirming and profound about a person we know nothing about!" It was true but that exercise helped her and all of us look for that one God-given gem each of us has been given. Each time we met we looked in the scripture, we searched inside of our hearts and we sought for that gem in each other. Again and again. I was amazed at how each day the youth came back. We showed up and we laughed and prayed and crept closer and closer to each other. The last day as we were going around the circle a really funny young man in the group, the only one to have missed one of our sessions, said, "At first I did not think I was really getting anything out of coming here. But, today I am really glad I came and I am really sorry I missed the one time I did. I had no idea I could have so much fun and I could honestly affirm meeting each of you." He had opened his heart enough to let others in and in the process had discovered that lost coin that Jesus was talking about. It is not so much about our looking for God but about what God finds about us. He had discovered that God finds each of us loveable and valuable just the way we are.

Lost and Found at Worship/Mindy Watts-Ellis

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Worship at Triennium is an energetic experience of song, drama, visual effects, and dynamic preachers. Of course, no worship service began without first waking us up and getting us moving to energizers. Energizers are simple dance movements set to popular tunes with positive messages. Everyone was up on their feet following along with the leaders as best as they could.

We were graced with 5 spectacular preachers during Triennium, a live band, a choir of about 200 youth, a drama team, and about 5,000 worshippers! Three of the preachers even received standing ovations from the youth who were especially moved by the message of the day.

The key messages were inspired by the hymn *Come Thy Fount of Every Blessing*. Sera Cheung told us to tune in to God and to each other. To tune-in requires resonating with one another in our joys and sorrows to make a fuller, more beautiful sound. We must take the dampers off to let our life song resonate and vibrate out into the world.

Sandra Van Opstal told us that we are more than what we do, and how others see us. God sees us for who we are, knows us, loves us, and can see what we can become. Jesus saw Zaccheus for what he could become. He could see the good inside him even when others ostracized him for his profession and his past sins. David Gambell told us that sin is real and rampant and makes it so easy to wander from God. You may know the moniker, "There's an app for that." He made a list, Pride=Instagram, Greed=Linked In, Gluttony=Yelp, Lust=Tinder, Envy=Facebook, Wrath=Twitter, and Sloth=Netflix. Despite our tendency to wander, God always calls us home and welcomes us.

Johan Daza shared a deeply personal story of his nephew Matteo and his need for a heart transplant in order to survive. He shared that ultimately it is God's heart that is the most compatible and the perfect match for our own. And the Reverend CC charged us to go out into our homes, our communities, and our world to make a difference by doing the work God has set out for each of us. No excuses accepted.

The final worship even finished off with confetti cannons. Wow! That is definitely something you don't see on an average Sunday morning. May we hold onto the awe and wonder of our time together from Triennium and the energy and enthusiasm of thousands of souls to go forth, following our hearts, to do God's work in the world.