

## **Lost and Found**

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Proverbs 3: 3-7a (The Message)

John 21: 1-19 (NIV)

There were a number of events in the past year that coalesced for me, that combined laid the groundwork for what I want to say this morning, about my wandering in the wilderness and what I found. The first event was a sermon that Will preached at the beginning of Lent that began with the question of whether we were checked in or checked out on our spiritual journeys. On hearing those words, “checked out”, my ears were immediately on high alert. This phrase, “checked out” was something I often berated myself for, a bad habit that I couldn’t quite conquer. During his sermon, Will offered 4 practices based on Jesus’s own journey in the wilderness and suggested that these practices might help us in our own journeys, and serve as a gauge to determine the degree to which we were “checked in” or “checked out.” The first of these practices was naming our demons, the things that trip us up, hold us back, cause us to lead, as he put it, diminished lives. This too caught my ear.

The second event was just a few weeks ago while listening to Karen Bellacosa's reflection. Again, my ears were on high alert. There were so many things she said that morning that resonated deeply with me, evoking some distant memory, a kind of Deja vu: her phrase – “the tenderest of threads;” the words from *Howards End* – “only connect;” the idea of synchronicity – how seemingly random, unrelated events seemed to connect with one another; and the article she quoted from about looking back to move forward. It was so reminiscent of something I had also been thinking about and something I had written about.

I keep a daily journal as part of my spiritual practice, and when I returned home that Sunday after Karen spoke, I got out my journals from the past year. I knew there was something in those journals that I needed to find. Finally, I found it in an entry from October 2022.

This is some of what I wrote that day: “There is something that I want to remember or capture, some elusive thread that keeps appearing and disappearing. Something about loss and connection. Something universal to us all but also very specific to me. I feel like I've been teasing this thread forever.” There was that word “thread.” After writing this, I then proceeded to

methodically list all the books, articles, and poetry I was reading, the podcasts I was listening to, trying to identify that thread. But it eluded me.

This leads me to the 3rd event.

My daughter and her family were fortunate to spend the summer in Europe, the month of July in London and the month of August traveling on the continent. When asked where I would like to join them on their journey, I chose London. I went to London for the first time in the mid-70's just after I graduated from college. I lived there for a year and a half, attending a small ballet school in Chelsea. It was a school made up mostly of young women, girls really, some as young as 15 or 16 who had traveled to London alone from places like Greece, Mexico, Zambia, Australia, Canada, Jamaica, the Philippines and the US. Of course, there were also local girls from England. At 21, I was one of the oldest "girls" there. I became close to two girls in particular: Lynne, an English girl, and Mary, a girl from Greece. The three of us even spent the summer before I returned home in Greece with Mary's family. That year and a half was one of the best times of my life. I have so many memories of that time in London and in Greece and have thought about that period in my life and

my friends often. And yet I had not seen or heard from any of them in 50 years. I decided to see if I could find Mary and Lynne. So, several months before my trip, I started my search. I googled them. I found Mary on Facebook, living in Rhodes. Contacting her through Facebook meant joining Facebook. My attempt to message her yielded no results, probably due to some inept error on my part. I googled Lynne and up she popped on a company website. She looked exactly the same but there was no contact information for her so I emailed the company's email address, explaining a little bit about how I knew Lynne, and would they be so kind as to pass along my email. The president of the company emailed me that very night, saying how he loved when things like this happened, and he would be delighted to pass along my email. What he didn't tell me was that Lynne no longer worked there. She had retired and unbeknownst to her but luckily for me, he had not taken her off the website. The very next morning I heard from Lynne. She too was delighted to hear from me and hoped that we would be able to get together while I was in London. She also forwarded my email to Mary, who as it happened, would be arriving in London the day before I left for home. Apparently, 4 of the "girls" who were the

same age had kept in touch and every 10 years gathered to celebrate those major milestone birthdays. This was one of those years. Another stroke of luck.

I was so excited. It was all I could think of. Lynne, Mary, and I emailed back and forth several times before my trip. It was decided that Lynne and I would meet two days before I left, just the two of us. Since I was staying near Piccadilly, she suggested meeting at Eros. Eros? Was that a restaurant? I googled it and discovered there is a huge statue of the Greek god of love, Eros, mounted on a large pedestal in the center of Piccadilly Circus.

On the day we were to meet, my daughter and my youngest granddaughter walked with me to Piccadilly. There were quite a few people milling about but I soon spotted Lynne descending the steps from Eros. I cannot describe the joy I felt in seeing her. Tears formed as I hugged her. I introduced her to my daughter and granddaughter. My daughter took a picture of us and then they left us alone to catch up. We found a café with outdoor seating and settled in for more than 2 hours, re-living those days long ago and sharing the lives we went on to lead since then.

The next day I met Lynne and the others at Sloan Square in Chelsea. The moment I saw Mary walking towards us from the tube station I felt that same elation I had felt the previous day on seeing Lynne. She too looked exactly as I remembered her. We had tea and birthday cake, shared stories and photographs and laughed a lot. We walked up Kings Road to find the school which had been located above a Methodist Church. The school is long gone, but the church is still there. We exchanged emails and posed for pictures outside the side door of the church that we had entered every day for class.

About a week after I returned home, I was talking to my sister telling her about my trip. At one point, I said, "What are the odds that A) even in this day and age where you can find anything online, that I would find them, B) that Lynne's boss hadn't taken her off the website and that he would actually forward my email to her and C) that my friends were planning to gather in London the very week I was there?" My sister said, "Laurie, I don't think odds have anything to do with it. I think it was the Holy Spirit." Taking that in, I hesitated before I said, "I don't know what to make of it." "What do you mean?", my sister asked. "I mean why didn't I stay in touch? Why did I let them go? You and I grew up in the

same household. You moved as often as I did and yet you stayed in touch with people. I am in touch with no one from my past except my siblings, and even them, I check out on.” My sister said she was reminded of a quote by Frederick Buechner. She couldn’t remember the exact wording or the book it was from, but it was something to the effect that nothing that is lost can compare to what is found. I later searched online and discovered the quote originally came from one of Buechner’s novels, entitled **Godric**. The main character, Godric, was reflecting on his life and his impending death. The exact quote was, “What’s lost is nothing to what’s found, and all death that ever was, set next to life, would scarcely fill a cup.” I later found an essay Buechner wrote expanding on this quote and reflecting on his own life and eventual death entitled **All’s Lost; All’s Found**.

In the weeks since my conversation with my sister and returning to that thread that I have been teasing, re-reading my journals, and my notes on Will’s and Karen’s sermons, and that long list of books, podcasts and poems, I found I had written the name of a poem and its author that I’m pretty sure I wasn’t reading at the time but was just reminded of. It was the poem **One Art** by Elizabeth Bishop, which I first heard in the movie **In Her**

**Shoes.** This movie was about the unbreakable bond between 2 sisters who lost their mother early in their lives to bi-polar disease. Over the years that bond was tested and nearly broken and for awhile they lost each other. The younger sister was working as an aide in an assisted living facility and reading poetry to an elderly blind man. This was the poem she read, **One Art**, about mastering the art of losing. This poem puzzled me because the poet seemed to be saying that one could practice the art of losing by first practicing losing small things, like keys or your glasses, and then working your way up to the big losses in life, like losing someone you loved; that none of these losses would be a disaster. The tight structure of her poem created a tension which belied the flippancy of her language. I turned to some analysis and the poet's biography. Elizabeth Bishop had experienced tremendous loss in her life, and one author suggested that perhaps her cavalier suggestion in this poem masked the truth: that there were some losses in life that were a disaster and what she was really suggesting was finding a way to survive.

It suddenly occurred to me that this was one of my demons. That I thought I could master the art of losing. That I could minimize my risk. That if I limited the number



of people in my life, jettisoning them along the way, that there would be fewer people to lose in the end. What was I thinking? I don't think I was thinking. This was a deeply ingrained pattern of behavior set in place early in my life long before I actually lost someone. It was a pattern developed out of fear and lack of trust.

Now what you may ask does all of this have to do with the passage in John that we read earlier. I chose that passage because of this one line - ***As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.*** Here was Jesus whom Peter thought he would never see again. Who he thought he had lost, and he jumped into the water and swam to the shore. I think that reaction is something akin to what I felt when I Lynne descend the steps of Eros and Mary walking towards me from the tube station. The author, Nora Gallagher in reflecting on this same passage, suggests that we are meant for relationship; that we are "meant to respond to swim toward Jesus and toward each other."

I'd like to close with words from Buechner, from the essay that I referenced earlier:

“We find by losing. We hold fast by letting go. We become something new by ceasing to be something old.... Out of Nothing [God] creates Something. Out of the End [God] creates the Beginning.... All’s lost, all’s found.

This summer I was given a second chance to find friends that I thought I had lost, and I grabbed it. Amen.