

The One

(Please know this sermon was written to be preached and not for publication. Thus, when you read it, please understand the punctuation and syntax may not be grammatically perfect.) ~ Rev. Emily J. Kellar

I remember the noise of the Mr. Pibb motor cross....all those motorcycles racing indoors in the Omni Coliseum in downtown Atlanta....the Coliseum held 15,000 peopleI reached down to pick up something and then slipped my hand into my father's hand....or at least what I thought was my father's hand....the noise deafening...horrified I looked up and saw a man I did not recognizehe was not my father...this was in the early 70s....all of a sudden I was lost...terrified...in a huge crowd....I remember the stranger asking if I was lost....I told him my father had just been there...the stranger said that he thought we should just stay put bc he believed my father would come back....and sure enough, after what seemed forever...probably only minutes...my father ran back to where I stood and he knelt down....oh Emily Anne, I thought you were right behind me....when I saw my father I was so relieved that I started crying and just clung to him as he knelt & hugged me....my father thanked the stranger in the very large crowd....I have never forgotten that sick feeling of being lost in an ocean of people...the one lostand the relief of being found....in the text today we hear

Jesus speak of the lost sheep and the lost coin....the themes of loss, of searching and relief come through....

Today in the text, we hear how Jesus would leave the 99 sheep and go after **the one** that was lost...I believe that reaching out to people in love was primary for Jesus of Nazareth....it was his life mission to be present for people...to go after **the one**...**the one** that was lost and needed help.....**the one** who was without hope....without faith....**the one** being marginalized ...later in this text the writer of the gospel of Luke says the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lostJesus declares his primary mission is to help lost folks....and to show them a life of love....

We see this clearly in today's text....Jesus tells the story of the shepherd with 100 sheep....one got lost....so the shepherd left the 99 to go find it....and he rejoiced over finding **the one**....this story is followed by a similar parable about a lost coin....and Jesus challenges us in this text to seek **the one**....the one without hope....without joy....without faith....one of the best ways to be of help to someone else is by how we live our own lives....to live like Christ....like a follower of the Christ....living lives of love, grace, compassion, integrity, service, social justice, and inclusion....preaching the gospel with our very lives using words only if necessary....

We can also be present for **the one**....for our neighbor....relationally
....taking a loaf of banana bread to a neighbor who has been under the
weather...maybe even a grouchy neighbor....anonymously leaving a bouquet of
flowers at the door of a neighbor who does not have family nearby....walking with
someone and being willing to be open about our lives by sharing...inviting a
neighbor to an event at our church....maybe an event in Ripley Chapel....what a
great space, Ripley Chapel....a place that extravagantly welcomes folks in your
community...for some people that may be their only experience of
church...attending a concert here...that's offering up love....

A few years ago, I was sitting in the office of Pastor Greg Manning in New
Orleans....Greg is the Lutheran Pastor of Broadmoor Community Church....the
same church I have taken youth to volunteer every summer.....the church with the
banner over its front doors that says “no perfect people allowed”Pastor Greg
has a heart for inner city ministry and ministry to at risk youth...he has a heart for
youth caught up in gang livingI had heard his mother had recently passed away
and I was in New Orleans and wanted to stop and give him my condolences in
person....sitting in his office I asked how a kid was doing who I had met the
previous summer while volunteeringhe said the kid had been shot & killed in a
drive by shooting a few months back....it took me off guard....I remember

thinking I had stopped by to relay my sympathy and I was the one sitting now with tears in my eyes....over the loss of **the one**....

I asked Greg how he kept opening the doors of his church to the youth...how did he keep holding up hope day after day....he quoted for me the number of kids that had found refuge in his church since Katrina....and then in Greg's particular way....he flashed this huge grin and said "but you know Pastor Emily, I would do it for **the one**....if **one kid** needed us, our doors would be open...open to feed them... clothe them... let them sit in safety and do their homework"....tears rolling slowly down his beautiful face...tears born out of devotion for **the one**...I have thought about that a lot....being present in our world today for **the one**...for **the one** person in my path who needs hope...for **the one** person at the border who needs help...for **the one** person out on the streets in need of a meal or just a cup of water...**the one**...the one transgender person being denied care....**the one**...**the one** on the margins....

Followers of the gospel of love take their faith seriously....seeking out people in the name of Love....seeking out the lost, the afraid, the hopeless, the joyless....having eyes wide open to see the world around us.....noticing the man sleeping on the bench and running to our trunks to pull out a fleece blanket to cover the man...**the one**.....seeing the lady at the stop light with a sign saying she is hungry and reaching over to grab a blessing bag filled with snacks, socks and

toiletries and handing it to **the one**.....and maybe handing over a \$5 bill too or even a \$20 if that's all we have...not worrying about what the money will be used for bc that's between them and their Creator....disciples do not walk by someone begging without looking them in the eye and saying hello....to **the One**...

For many many years my mother spent her life working with the unhoused in downtown Atlanta....over 40 years.....that is where I learned **not** to look away....bc that crushes a person's very soul but rather to look them in the eye, greet **the one** and ask how their day is going....it is where I learned to give out blessing bags....it is where I learned the unhoused are the faces of the Christ....it also where I learned to never make assumptions, as one day I was at the shelter in downtown Atlanta chatting with an ex executive of Coca Cola who had become a drug addict after rotator cuff surgery and ended up on the streetit was Thanksgiving weekend one particular Sunday in Atlanta...and I had come to see my mother but that meant going to church with the unhoused at the Gateway Center in downtown Atlanta...after the service that day a man started talking with me "I was a veteran.....your mother got me legal help and doctors and I now work and pay rent & live nearby but I still come to church here....in case I can be of encouragement to **the one**...he said....**the one** person who needs to see they can get help....that they are worthy of help"....

I thought of '**the one sheep**'....that Christ returned for, lifted up and put on his shoulders....this lone person standing therethe one sheep....did Jesus bend down and pat the sheep....help unentangle them from the brush of life....from the thicket...from the snares of this world....did Jesus lovingly embrace the sheep and lift them up safe on his shoulders....safe from the world around.....do we do that for others? Do we go after **the one** and lift it up.... lifting up another person's day....by sending an encouraging text.... or making a call...

In the beginning of this text it says "By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The religious leaders were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story of the lost sheep...." May we take in sinners always and eat meals with them bc folks **we are them**....may we remember **the one****the one** person who needs to be rescued...to be lifted up....may we never forget that we too are no different from the person on the street corner....may we act like disciples seeking out people....living our lives unashamed of the Gospel of love that we profess to believe in...and perhaps may we remember most of all that the Shepherd went after **the one**....God seeks us out when we are lost and fearful....we do not have to go seeking for God....

O God be with **the one** this day....**the one** who is without hope....**the one** out there in need of love....**the one** on a street corner longing to be greeted and treated like one of your own...**the one** on the margins....**the one** victim of war....**the one** child of violence...may we be Jesusthe hands and feet of the Christ....and may we remember you would return for **the one, O God....the one** kid at Broadmoor Community Church....**the one** begging on the street corner....**the one** addict after shoulder surgery....but most of all, Creator may we never walk past **the one**....neglect seeing **the one**....for if we do, then we will have turned away from the you, the Christ....amen.