

The rope around our waist

1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Rev J Shannon

I want to talk about attachment before I talk about these parables. Good and bad attachment. You can well imagine it has been on my mind because the Queen is dead and people are dealing with their own way of interpreting change. We are attached to our history and attached to the idea of 'the queen'.

And this week, as you know, we've been moving house...again. Do I keep this book? I've read it. I love it but...and what about this dress? or is mutton dressed as lamb? Just how many potato peelers is enough??

My sister is also in the process of moving and she posting memories on face book and object d'art looking for homes. Remember this? Who wants this framed family photo? Would anyone like some of Dad's furniture?

My dad was a fine wood worker in his spare time so her house is full of large, heavy, beautiful pieces like dining tables, fruit bowls and sculptures. To own one is to have a little piece of our father...but not all of it will fit in her new unit. It's hard to give up these things. We attach to them, not just for their beauty but also because we are attached to the people.

Last week was another grief workshop where I reminded people that when a person dies, they don't disappear from our stories. We are forever attached to them as they shaped us.

Attachment is a very important thing – even though sometimes, it can be damaging. You have all read stories of the abandoned children left in orphanages in both China and Eastern Europe. We know that children abandoned at birth have attachment issues. A baby left alone, untouched, is damaged.

It can mean that they never form close bonds or it can lead them to attach to dangerous or damaging characters or cults¹. Anyone or anything that makes them feel like they belong.

Dr Maureen Miner Bridges², gave a key note address on Attachment to God at the Soul Care Conference in Sydney last week.

¹ Ex. Ghislaine Maxwell & Jeffrey Epstein, various serial killing duos etc

² Director of Research at Excelsia College and director of Lumen Research Institute. Previously Senior Lecturer in Psychology, UWS

She talked about what is secure spiritual attachment and why it is important for healing and sustaining transformation. There is plenty of medical research that demonstrates those people with faith and or close, positive attachments are able to endure greater discomfort and pain, have shorter stays in hospital and recover faster than those who do not.

But a lot depends on how you see God, or should I say, what is your relationship with God? Chaplains and pastoral practitioners are familiar with helping people explore and expand a person's inner and outer relationships.

If your view of God is a judgmental and punishing father, then that will have a direct impact on how you are in the world. It may be that you act that out in your relationships with others. It may be that you see your infirmity as just. You deserve to suffer. It is not particularly helpful perspective in a medical situation.

That is not what Jesus was saying. These two parables are about attachment. Not *your* attachment but God's. These stories are significant because neither the sheep or the coin are left for lost but made objects of divine concern.

God is looking for you. Seeking attachment.

This may be a totally surprising picture of God for those who may have attachment to a stern taskmaster, a vindictive judge or a divine score keeper.

Jesus tells us a story of a celebratory God throwing a celestial party the angels don't want to miss.

So overjoyed is the God/woman, they want to tell their friends literally tell out their soul!! The extravagance of the celebration may well have exceeded the value of the sheep or the coin. Extravagant joy. Imagine a God filled with divine joy. And that's why I love the Francis Assisi poem I have recited to you before...

God would kneel down

I think God might be a little prejudiced.
For once He asked me to join him on a walk through the world,
and we gazed into every heart on this earth,
and I noticed He lingered a bit longer
before any face that was weeping,
and before any eyes that were laughing.
And sometimes when we passed
a soul in worship
God too would kneel down.

I have come to learn: God
Adores
His creation.

Saint Francis (1182-1226)

But Jesus is not just telling us of an extravagant love. He is intentionally provocative because he knows the God of Israel, the stern task master that the pharisees believe they represent.

He sees into their hearts and once again, intentionally turns the tables. The very ones who point out his sins for eating with sinners, gentiles and tax collectors.

It subverts and disorients those who are offended by the remarkable generosity of a God who reaches out to the unwanted, the unloved and worst of all, to the 'unclean'. It is not an accident but an intentional goading that He chose a shepherd and woman as the images of God in these stories. A shepherd – the untrustworthy, unwashed, outside-the-walls, lowest socio-economic unit ...and a *woman* (said with distaste)! That was designed to get up the noses of the Pharisees.

Knowing THIS God, this searching god, is like a rope around your waist. You can go out into the storm. You can endure the un-endurable and know you will be found. **That** is the message in these stories.