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Some of you know that I moved here with my family a year ago after almost nine years in Hawaii. I'm from the East Coast, having lived in New York City and New Haven, so I was coming back to some family and old friends. And quickly, a group of us scheduled a girls weekend in New York in October. I arranged overnight child care for my kids and bought some gifts but a few days before it, the host got covid. So we rescheduled it for December. Someone else got Covid. January, a blizzard hit, shutting down the roads. In March, the first one to get covid got it again. This time I was the only one who hadn't had it and had to sit it out. The other two, encouraged by their fresh boost of temporary immunity went anyway.

That was *four weekends* I was excited for the connection, the fun, the silliness, the catching up, *four weekends* where I found overnight child care which is no small feat, and four times I didn't see my friends.

We made some noise about getting together this summer but it never happened and now we are looking ahead to this fall and winter.

And let me tell you: I kinda don't want to even try.

Scientists will tell me I am suffering from a classic case of Pike Syndrome. Researchers once put a Northern Pike into a large aquarium, placed a glass divider in the middle, and put the pike's favorite meal, a school of minnows, on the opposite side of the glass. As the pike got hungry it attempted to eat the smaller fish but succeeded only in banging its nose against the glass.

Eventually it gave up. Even when the glass divider was removed and the minnow swam freely around the tank, the pike didn't eat them. He didn't even try.

It's not that the pike was no longer hungry. He was starving. It's that the pike associated the minnows not with sustenance but with frustration and discomfort. They would not fill his need; they would only make it worse.

I have to believe I am not the only one this semester suffering from Pike Syndrome. Post-covid (hopefully), we're all a little off-balance, hungry for something we can't quite name, unsure of

how to find it. I've been told that binge drinking is at an all time high among our first-year students — young people who spent two years of high school in some remote learning capacity, fresh on a college campus, uncertain how to behave anymore, unsure of how to make an authentic connection.

Searching for something we don't have, something we need even if we don't know it, something we maybe once had but no longer do — this is not an easy place to be. It can feel awful, in fact. On 9/11, 21 years ago today, I was living in Manhattan's Upper East Side, in the zip code that had the most fatalities. For weeks after, as I walked to the subway station, I stopped to look at the hundreds of "Missing" posters that were taped and stapled to the utility poles at each corner. Bodies had not been found yet, and loved ones held out some hope that their brother or girlfriend was just missing, that maybe they would be found. Dozens of images of young, fresh-faced people, covering the entire surface of every lamp post.

I wondered if it would have been easier to see these faces everyday if the flyers had said, "deceased" instead of "missing," which of course is tragically what they were. *Missing* implied that each of these faces had loved ones who were stuck in that anguished space of searching for what was lost. Agonized by the

fact they couldn't be found, yet hopeful that they might turn up somehow. Unable to sleep or eat, jumping at every phone call, praying like they'd never prayed before.

Even if we've never had to search New York City's hospitals for a loved one, we've all been there. We search for little things that feel enormous: a car key, a beloved stuffed bunny, a debit card... And we search for the bigger things: a lost connection with an old friend, a new and improved romantic partner, a clue as to where our life is going.

Searching for someone or something means we recognize that we don't feel complete on our own. Searching implies a deep vulnerability, a lack somewhere. But it also implies that we have hope that the hole can be filled, that the missing piece can be found.

In today's Gospel, an elderly widow searched her house for a lost coin. She's the person in Israelite society who had the least amount of social power. No husband meant no standing, no income, no security, no protection. Widows were entirely dependent on the good will of those around them. So when this

widow loses her coin, it is her savings she has lost. She is desperate to find it.

This is how desperately God searches for each of us when we are lost. Urgent, persistent, and unstoppable until successful. And who among us isn't just a little bit lost? Who among us is stuck behind a glass divider that was actually removed months ago? Who here has never turned their back on God, too angry or depressed, or simply too busy? Who among us doesn't at some level feel the need to be found by God, to have God reach out to us and connect right where we most need healing? If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is all of us.

"I tell you," Jesus says to us, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." This may mean that 99 out of 100 of us will consider ourselves righteous and not at all in need of a change of heart. But it may also mean this: that 99 times out of 100 *we will tell ourselves* that we are fine, that we don't need anyone or anything, that we have it figured out and that we can do it all ourselves. 99% of the time we live in that fiction. Only 1% of the time will we let our deepest self step forward and say, "No, I

can't. I can't do it by myself. I need help." Only 1% of the time will we let ourselves use the words, "Lord, I am lost."

Somehow, this opens us up. And this is repentance. So often repentance is associated with guilt and confession, but it more accurately means changing the way we see, recognizing that maybe our ways are not the best ways. That we are lost.

To admit that we feel incomplete, that we are searching for something, is to be in touch with a fundamental component of human identity: that we are wired to search for God. God implanted this desire in us and we cannot escape it.

So what do we do when we keep bumping into the glass? What do we do when we have been trying for so long but nothing has changed? Pause here because *this* is the 1 out of 100 times, this is the place where God is searching for you, this is the portal to grace.

Look around: we are a Type A people, accustomed to success, trained to see hard work as the way to reach our goals and get our needs met. And this is all well and good. But there is a place within each of us where none of that matters, where strenuous

effort doesn't get us closer to connection, where being good does not earn us authentic love.

God — for reasons unknown — is really good at meeting us in our vulnerability, our insecurity, our lost-ness. And that ONE time we let ourselves acknowledge it is where the path begins.

God is searching for each of us as we sit here now, wanting us to feel that love even more than we do. We've been through a hard time, all of us. So let's let ourselves be found.

God is good and God is everywhere.

Amen