

**Sermon for September 11, 2022**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Proper 19, Year C**  
**The Venerable Patricia Soukup**  
**Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church**

[Exodus 32:7-14](#)

[Psalm 51:1-11](#)

[1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)

[Luke 15:1-10](#)

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight,  
o Lord my strength and my Redeemer. Amen*

It's the most frustrating feeling: you spend days assembling a jigsaw puzzle, only to discover that one piece was not in the box. You are out and about and sense that something is amiss with your person. You tug at your earlobe and discover that one of your earrings is not on your ear. You open a family photo album only to find that a favorite snapshot has fallen out. And your first reaction is, "A puzzle piece (or an earring, or a photo) is lost." And you begin looking all around the area to locate the item.

In my job as a court-appointed conservator, one of my duties is to inventory the physical assets of my clients and ensure that those assets are secured and protected. A couple of weeks ago, one of my co-workers and I went to the home of a new client who had recently been moved from her home to a care facility, and with notebooks in hand, we began to make lists of the personal property in the home.

My co-worker opened what looked like a jewelry case with a hinged lid, and out floated dozens of very tiny, shiny objects. At first it looked like confetti that was falling to the floor, but that didn't quite compute. After gathering handfuls of these small objects and studying them under a bright light, I realized what we were looking at. These were miniature coins of dozens of countries, each with the diameter of a pencil eraser! They had tumbled to the floor when we opened the box because they had not been secured in the recessed, padded indentations in the case. Once we realized what we had before us, both of us got on our hands and knees and began combing every inch of the floor with a flashlight to try to find every single miniature coin. We meticulously pressed each one into an indentation in the case, but alas, when every coin that we had picked up been placed in the case, there was one open indentation; one coin was missing. The set was incomplete, and the impact of that one missing coin on the value of the entire unique set cannot even be calculated.

Have you ever noticed that money never ends up in the lost and found box? Nor do cell phones. But I can't tell you how many pairs of prescription eyeglasses or articles of clothing I have seen sitting forlornly in the bottom of a lost and found box. At some point, the box is emptied out, and the contents are generally donated. Why don't people go in search of these personal items? Is it because these things do not have value? Is it because people do not perceive them as important?

A shepherd goes in search of one sheep that has wandered astray. A woman does a deep clean of the house to try to uncover an elusive coin that is part of her dowry. Why are these items different than the rejects at the bottom of the lost and found box? I wonder if perhaps it is because they are each part of something larger, like a sheep fold or a dowry, and the value of the missing object will reduce the value of the collection as a whole if it is not restored. If a sheep is separated from the flock, neither the sheep nor the flock is whole. A coin collection with one coin missing is not a full set and will not be worth as much as a complete coin collection. The quote attributed to Aristotle holds true: “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

This past Thursday, the world was plunged into mourning for England’s longest-reigning monarch, and the death of Queen Elizabeth II is having ripple effects around the globe in political and social arenas as well as in the Anglican Communion. What many people do not realize is that the reigning monarch is also the Defender of the Faith and the Supreme Governor of the Church of England! One person is gone, but that one person touched hundreds of millions of lives during her 70 years on the throne, and it is impossible to place a value on her life of service to the United Kingdom and to the rest of the world.

But things only have value if we assign them value. The golden calf that the Israelites cast was made from the jewelry and the possessions that they owned, melted down and sculpted and shaped to suit them. It was an image of what they perceived as powerful. Coins are no different. They are molten and cast into dies, then they are shaped with tools to bear different images. And these images are powerful because they carry value. They are icons that represent what we have. The golden calf represented what the Israelites had, and they worshipped it and sacrificed to it because it was easy, and it was visible. They got tired of waiting for God, so they took matters into their own hands. But in doing so, they lost something; they lost their relationship with God.

One commentator has stated, “As it is when we are separated from right relationship with God, we aren’t operating in our true, full purpose. That is why God seeks us to be in right relationship and delights in restoration. This seeking is not just for the lost, but for every child of God wherever we find ourselves.”

Twenty-one years ago today, nearly 3,000 people from 78 different countries lost their lives in the terrorist attacks on the United States, and the impact of this loss is still felt today. Those 3,000 individuals came from all walks of life. Many were victims of the actual attacks, and some were first responders who rushed in to save the lives of others and in so doing lost their own lives. And we cannot forget the thousands of service members who have sacrificed their own lives in the protection of our country since that time. These individuals were small pieces of something much larger than themselves. The lives of these individuals were deeply connected with thousands and thousands of other lives, and as a nation, we have pledged that their legacies will live on and that we will never forget September 11, 2001.

The following tribute was recently posted regarding that fateful day: “The 9/11 terrorist attacks were designed to leave us in ruin. They took so much from us, but they also brought out the best in us. That day, every American had a common purpose: to help one another. From the first responders navigating the perils at Ground Zero to the average citizen who looked to assist

in any way that they could, we stared the dangers down and reminded the world what it means to be an American.”

But as we gather here today, we must ask ourselves, what does it mean to be a Christian? As followers of Christ, what is our common purpose? I believe the answer lies in what my co-worker and I experienced when we opened that case and stared at the tiny objects that fluttered out to the floor that day. We realized that each and every one of those tiny objects bore an image that was powerful, and though they were not legal tender, each of those coins had great value and was part of something much larger. Each was fragile, each was unique, and each had its place in the case. And we were very frustrated and disappointed that we could not locate the one missing coin.

And the kingdom of God is no different than that coin case and its contents. Jesus calls us to be in right relationship with God, and a pivotal part of this relationship is our relationship with those on the margins of society who have fallen and drifted aside and are easily lost: the sick, the elderly, the mentally ill, the lonely, those suffering from addiction, and the list goes on. God calls us to look at each and every one of those children of God just as my co-worker and I studied each tiny coin. God calls us to recognize their value and to seek and serve Christ in each one. The kingdom of God is not a lost and found box with worthless items; it is like the case with the slots waiting to be filled with unique and valuable coins. So let each of us seek to do what we can to make the kingdom of God whole so that there are no empty slots. For indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Amen.