

The Process of Finding and Losing

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Based on: Matthew 10:32-39

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Coming to a new place often causes a sifting through of old things. There is a sense of losing and finding that accompanies this experience. A home renovation, a house move, an overseas experience, a new job all require some degree of the sorting, culling, organizing and packing up of old belongings. The acceptance of a change is often marked with some sense of loss. The letting go of the old to make room for the new.

Once in a new environment, the finding also begins - as boxes are opened and items removed - old treasures are rediscovered, forgotten books and notes recovered - treasured memories find their place on shelves and in drawers and on bulletin boards...But our lives and experiences continue to move us forward - old, cherished items share space with new signs of life - a note of welcome, a recent word of inspiration, a title of the latest book to read...

We know that the stuff of our lives, is ultimately just stuff - but the move - the transition - often forces us to sift through and weigh out the meaning and value attached to each object.

There is a process of finding and losing that also marks our spiritual journeys. In her book, *Leaving Church*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes the following:

"Like every believer I know, my search for spiritual('real') life has led me through at least three distinct seasons of faith, not once or twice but over and over again. Jesus called them finding life, losing life, and finding life again.

In Greek, the word is *psyche*, meaning not only "life" but also the conscious self, the personality, the soul. You do not have to die to discover the truth of this teaching, in other words.

You only need to lose track of who you are, or who you thought you were supposed to be... Do this, Jesus says, and you will live.

As hard as preachers may work to clarify this teaching, I do not believe that it can be done. The promise contains truth that can only be experienced, and even when it is I do not know anyone who readily volunteers for loss again. Yet loss is how we come to surrender our lives - if not to God, then at least to the Great Beyond - and even those who profess no faith...may still confess that losing really has helped them find their ways again."

I came across this book in a personal season of loss, after leaving the position of Associate Pastor almost two years ago at Floradale Mennonite. It was not easy for me to leave,

but it was a very good goodbye. I wanted to spend some time this morning to share about how seasons of "finding, of losing and finding again" have been present in my own spiritual journey and in my call to ministry. Realizing, that as an Interim Pastor- you did not have an opportunity to hear much about me before I began my work here. More importantly, in sharing parts of my story I invite you to think about how these times of "finding, losing and finding again", have affected your own spiritual journeys.

Finding Ministry - Under a full moon in late July, I made the decision to claim my faith as my own. I was baptized at summer camp in the camp pool. A wooden cross, alight with candles floated in the water beside me. I was surrounded by my younger siblings, my Mom, My counselor and my cabinmates. I was just thirteen, but remember feeling so confident and calm. As the water rose over my head and as I was lifted back through into the warm summer night- I was all at once rebirthed, encircled by the moon, by accapela songs and soggy hugs.

At thirteen, I didn't understand what this decision might mean for me. I had no idea what I was stepping out of the pool onto...what adventures and loss and learnings and growth and unexpected gifts lay waiting ahead for me. I felt, on that night, like I was in control - to step out and follow God, to walk the Jesus way to be led by the Spirit...I didnt realize the amazing risk that I was taking, and the trust it requires to be open to be led to places where I might not feel prepared to go...

One of my beloved theology Proffs Jim Reimer once said that "there is only one baptism, but many conversions experiences". I have come to claim this truth in my life; especially when you are baptized at 13 and still have alot of living left to do.

Overall, I consider myself quite fortunate. I have not experienced much loss in my life, not really. But the losses that I have experienced have helped me to arrive at a place where eventually - I become open to *finding again* - where I could notice the light that filters through dark seasons - the light of new learnings, of new growth and new challenges. Instead of "getting back" to ourselves after loss, it is for me about accepting how loss - infused with God's presence - might shape us into something new.

Here are some of my experiences of loss, or the loosing seasons in my own life: When my childhood faith was tested and shaken by new ideas, new friends at university; You can see the dark and light of this experience....there was a lot of fear that bubbled up to the surface for me, as I unpacked cherished convictions, dusted off old questions, but I also found new sparks of passion and strength in trusting a bigger picture of God than I ever could have imagined at 13.

I also lived through the loss of our family home to fire. Although, being quite young, I only experienced the good that came out of this situation. I was able to sleep between my

parents in a tent all through the summer and in the basement as the house took shape around us. I was able to feel the support from the community that cared for us and the help that we received.

Another kind of loss came when my sister was diagnosed with schitzoaffective disorder, this experience affects a whole family, outside of the individual who lives with mental health concerns intimately. This experience can cut deep and steal all the air in a room and throw off comfortable family rhythms and patterns - but it also requires more understanding, more hope, and more love than we may have thought we were ever capable of finding. My sibling's walk with major mental health issues continues to teach me and to inform my faith.

I have lost an Oma, a Grandfather, left home for highschool (where I boarded), for university and for marriage. I have found new homes with new friends, overseas in China, and with many different expressions of mennonite neighbours in the village of Floradale.

I have at times lost sight of who I was, as I tried to navigate a career path...and I have both lost and found myself in calls to motherhood and ministry, in creating art and always in my family and close friends.

I would not have guessed that I would one day become a Pastor. Mostly because in my childhood context, I only knew of male ministers and the idea of pursuing this career would have not even appeared as an option.

Although, I do remember a moment, early on around age 9 or 10, when I asked my Dad (who is a Minister) why I could't preach and teach like him...he paused, as I have learnt that a Pastor should always do...and said "Kendra, your faith is your own" ...he did not answer my question with the whys or why nots, but instead gave me a gift; words that allowed me the permission to live into this possibility. Your faith is your own. Now as a parent myself, with a child of 10, I begin to understand how hard it may have been for my Dad to say this, not knowing where it may lead. (And, as a parent, I am reminded that his words were born out of faith and love and not fear.)

I am not saying that I am doing a particular great thing by being a Pastor. It often feels too safe and too institutionalized - compared to the earthy Jesus, who moved along dirt roads in sandals, who prayed alone in the mountains, who slept in the belly of boats and along roadsides - the Jesus - who - in the scripture read for us this morning talks about how difficult leavings can be. Whether physical or theological shifts - these can affect the whole family. In the context of the passage read for us today - Jesus has called his first disciples, he has described the work that he is calling them to and given some practical advice - I can hear him say to me, "Kendra, you are an oldest kid, you like to be fed by praise - it is a trap for you...try to find your center in God, so that you do not function out of a place of needing praise. And you

also were a very sensitive kid, sometimes that sensitivity creeps back into your Ministry work, don't let it - you must grow thick skin for this work - what you are doing is not about you, but the One who has sent you and who works through you - keep challenging your own ego everyday..."

This scripture passage (Matt. 10:32-39) is difficult because it speaks about family. I think it is speaking about being called out of our families for different things, even when our families struggle to understand us.

We always grapple deeply as a church and as a family with what matters to us most. My choice to become a Pastor, for instance, affected my Mom differently than my Dad, because it forced her, whether she wanted to or not, to look at her own role and understanding and convictions...I didn't intend on making life difficult, especially at first, for my Mom in this way...but that is what happened - at least at first.

So Finding Myself in Ministry happened through some loss. I had to dump out the napsack of my childhood faith and repack it with some things old and some things new. This was not an easy task - but anything worth doing is often marked by some pain and struggle. Some amount of empty, dark space - where new light, new understanding, and new life can be noticed and begin to grow.

Leaving Ministry - I left Floradale almost 2 years ago. I left because I was beginning to sense a tiredness around my ministry. I had never left a people that I had loved and served before. And so it was hard. But maybe it is always hard. And it was a very good goodbye. I chose to leave at a high time, while I was still in good energy, and not a low time where I might have gone about my work either half-heartedly or with bitterness.

But I also left because on some level I was still struggling with this odd and wonderful call to Pastor - and I have come to accept this struggle as a good thing - to not to be completely settled in this role. To be brave enough to step out of it - to wait and see if I would be called back into it.

So my season of *finding again...* in Ministry. This call is affirmed in realizing that I bring my Ministering self to whatever work I do. As we all do. Ministering, has become part of my identity. And in truth was part of me long before a formal role in ministry was articulated in my life.

Over the past two years, I have enjoyed walking alongside kids of all abilities, and learning from them as I taught them art - art, that I must admit, poured out of me...and walking with the people of Parkwood Seniors Community has taught me about how to be present. To be present with people and to extend dignity and care as the body finds its limitations and

begins to fail. To be present with the family and individual at a bedside in the time of death - I am forever shaped and grateful for these learnings.

And of course, I am finding Ministry again in finding you. In coming here for a year to walk with you. I feel called back to church ministry in a profound way. Another conversion, another rebirth, another moving through the waters to find the gift of this morning - the music, the vibrant expressions of God that you embody - here in this place. The laughter, the emails, the activity and also the deep commitment, the hospitality and hope that marks this church family.

Pastoring is one of those positions in life where you often feel like you are never doing enough. But I find my 13 year old calm and confidence in Pastoring when I understand it - not as a great thing - but as many small things done with great love...to borrow from Mother Theresa "There are no great things, only many small things done with great love". That has become a Ministry mantra for me.

I pray that in this coming year, as a church, that God will come near and be at work in your discerning process - that you might take your time. Time to look at your identity as a faith community and discern the ways you need a Pastor both to compliment your gifts and to bring strength to your places of weakness... May God bless you richly in this coming year as you take the time to *reflect on seasons of losing* or times of loss, and what they have taught you. And also as you revel in *the finding times* - in cherished memories - and in all the ways that this community is strong and flourishing and well fed...

I pray that as a church, you would remain open to the possibility of letting go of some old things to make room for new ones - giving yourself the permission to treasure things about the legacy of this place - but to not allow what you treasure to keep you from finding new life again and again.

This is a my prayer for you, the ending of which we must live into together - in the year ahead. And so we step out again in the newness of this morning to where God's Spirit might call us both individually and as a community into this process of finding and losing that shapes our lives. Amen.

