



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Idols in the Lost and Found

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

September 15, 2013

I used to have a cat, his name was Yellow. I really loved him; he was big and goofy and dumb, always doing big goofy things. One thing that he really liked was the cellophane wrapper from a hard candy. He would play with one for hours, batting it around on the hard wood floors, stalking it like it was going to do something. Yellow was a house cat, which I always assumed was a good idea for an animal with so few smarts. One day, however, he scaled the backyard fence and escaped. Of course, I went running through the neighborhood yelling for Yellow - which probably reflected badly on my intelligence because he had never actually come when called before. In a moment of inspiration, I ran to the house and grabbed a butterscotch hard candy tore off the wrapper and went back outside. You can only imagine how crazy I looked, running around, stopping to rattle the candy wrapper, hoping that it would produce the cat. No luck, eventually I headed home. As I neared the yard, I looked up to see Yellow sitting on the top of the fence with his tail twitching, watching me look for him. I'd thought he was lost; he had no idea why I should think that. He was having a fine time. Isn't that often the way?

Being really lost is a terrible feeling; it's disorienting if you can't find your way, like trying to find an address in the dark when there are no street signs and no house numbers. It's frustrating. Now with ever-present GPS, it's less likely to happen to us and if it does, you just call on your cell phone and get directions.

We are more likely to feel lost within circumstances, how do we find our way out of a bad situation? I think this is common with geo-political storms when much is at stake. It's frightening to think about what might happen if a wrong move is made. We have situations in our personal lives that can feel like a maze, dead ends and blocked corridors, going over the same route time and time again. Will you ever get out?

And then there's the other side of being lost - being the one who loses something or someone. G.K. Chesterton said, "The way to love anything is to realize that it may be lost." As human beings, we are vulnerable to loss, losing someone that we love, through death, distance, heaven forbid, by betrayal. The feelings that come with that kind of loss are so strong that we can feel lost ourselves. That's what grief does to us. It is an emotion attributed to God, through Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The heartbreak at the divine level when an entire part of creation becomes lost is beyond our comprehension.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

In today's reading from Exodus, God's response to the Israelites willful rejection is likened to fiery anger. Moses has to talk God down from obliterating the Israelites. It's not a particularly appealing presentation of God - not the "slow to anger and of infinite kindness" that we hear elsewhere. More likely a human experience of painful rejection has been attributed to the divine. The story is understandable from a human perspective. The Israelites were rescued from slavery, saved from Pharaoh's army, given a guiding presence in the desert, they were fed when they were hungry, and given water to drink. Then, after such generous effort on God's part, the people quickly retreated into fear after being left alone as Moses went up the mountain. They didn't know how to get along on their own, and so they made the symbol of a familiar Egyptian god. I think that it is one of our greatest failings. When people feel lost and frightened they will follow almost anything that gives them a sense of security and confidence. The golden calf is the spiritually immature response to vulnerability.

Now, just as Yellow didn't think that he was lost, we often don't realize it ourselves. It takes vigilance and awareness of the idols that we follow or construct ourselves to know when we have wandered off into the wilderness. There are questions we must ask; what do our idols ask of us and what is the cost of following them? In *A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts* I found a good definition of idols:

The Bible views idols as human artifacts; hence idol worship is regarded as a form of materialism, and, conversely, any false reliance on human power or wealth is a form of idolatry. A more spiritual conception of idolatry is to identify it with egoism and human craving, since attachment to these false realities separates us from our true nature.

I heard a really interesting presentation at Rotary this past week by former Connecticut Robert Steele. He is the author of *The Curse: Big Time Gambling's Seduction of a Small New England Town*. The book is written as a novel, but Congressman Steele, lives in Ledyard, in the shadow of the casinos and witnessed firsthand how they came about, what was promised, what the realities for the surrounding communities and Connecticut's economy have become. It was scary because even for those of us who don't ever go and are not interested in gambling, we cannot escape its presence in our lives. Connecticut's two casinos were phenomenally successful when they first opened. The revenues have been mind-boggling, so much so that Maine, Rhode Island and now Massachusetts have or are opening their own which does not bode well for Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun.

The stories that surround these casinos reveal the desperate downsides of the gambling economy. There is no economic benefit to the surrounding towns. People who go to the casinos arrive and stay. They spend their money within, eat at the restaurants and even buy their gas there when they leave. All the towns have seen is low wage jobs and the diminishment of their

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

communities. Worse than that, Connecticut has become known as the embezzlement capital. There has been a 400% rise in embezzlement from the opening of Foxwoods in 1992 to 2007 which is more than 10 times the national average. Pathological gamblers will tap any available source of money to keep on gambling. These addicted people are the backbone of casino success and at what cost? Each case of embezzlement hurts a whole lot of people. It's not always just stealing from an employer, it's things like treasurers of organizations, maybe churches. Imagine how that would feel? Families are devastated and then there is the cost of apprehending, prosecuting and incarceration.

Connecticut relies heavily on revenue from these two establishments - and the future does not look good. Gambling is sweeping our nation. Rhode Island, Maine and Massachusetts have or will have their own casinos soon pulling revenues from Foxwood's and the Sun. To find more gambling revenue, we now have Keno in a lot of restaurants so kids can be exposed to it at a really young age. And then there's internet gambling which is affecting our youth a whole lot. Imagine what you can now do with a credit card?

Our culture is saturated and lost in a wilderness of the lure of easy money. I can't think of a better example of an idol than that. I have no idea what it will take to find our way out of it but the first thing, as always, is to recognize that we have problem, even if we don't gamble at all. In a shaky economy it's not surprising that people turn to something in hope, but this deck is stacked against us all.

Gambling is hardly the only idol that we have in our lives right now. There is the idolatrous believe in force and weaponry to keep us safe and isolation blinders to keep from having to see the suffering around us. The call of our creator is to unity. The work of Christ is to know ourselves as one body. A commitment to being the Body of Christ, to live that reality out in the world and see the divine when we reach out and connect is the way home. Imagine what it will feel like when we can look back on these things and say with gladness that we had been lost but now are found.

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org

203-488-2681

e-mail rector47@trinitybranford.org