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ADD TO THE COMMUNITY

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We are continuing our year long series. We are calling it PRAXIS: The Experiment. You've heard this a lot. There are five particular practices we are asking you to engage in. They are to pray for the entire world, to read through the word, to add to the community, to invest in the kingdom, and to send yourself to the nations. We are on the last of those practices which is to add to the community. We are going to be thinking about that theme throughout Lent. This morning, our Old Testament reading comes from the prophet Hosea.

Hosea is a really interesting prophet. He is called one of the Minor Prophets only because his book is a little bit shorter, not because he's any less significant. Hosea is used by God in some interesting ways.

All of the prophets are prophets because God speaks through them to the people. That's what it means to be a prophet: to speak on God's behalf to God's people. Many of the prophets are used to speak on God's behalf not just with their words, but with their lives. And so Hosea's life, like many prophets, becomes almost a drama or play that is acted out in front of the Israelites so that they might know who God is and what his heart for them is like.

Hosea also uses a metaphor that is common in Scripture. It is the metaphor of God's relationship with his people being like a marriage relationship where God is the husband and Israel is the wife. We see that again in the New Testament when we see Christ and the Church being the bride of Christ.

In Hosea that metaphor is a little different. In the very first chapter of Hosea, God comes to the prophet and says go and take a wife of unfaithfulness. Essentially, go take a prostitute as a wife. Hosea goes and he marries a woman named Gomer and they have children together. And for each one of those children God gives a special name that relates to his relationship with his people. God says, "I claimed you, you who were unfaithful, and made you mine and yet you left me," and so Gomer leaves Hosea. She abandons him and then God sends Hosea back to this wife who has abandoned him for another lover, and we pick up in the third chapter of the prophet Hosea.

Hosea 3:1-5

The LORD said to me again, 'Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.' So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer of barley and a measure of wine. And I said to her, 'You must remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the whore, you shall not have intercourse with a man, nor I with you.' For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterwards the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their

God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

I've got to say as an aside that at times I am really grateful that I am a pastor and not a prophet because those guys had it kind of rough. And one of these days we're going to preach a sermon on the evils of raisin cakes, but that's not going to work this morning.

Okay, our New Testament reading comes from the Gospel of Luke, the fifteenth chapter. This is a really familiar chapter, and so I'm going to ask you to try to hear it fresh. This is the chapter we call the "lost" chapter, where there are the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. If you are like me you have probably misread this story especially the last chapter, the story of the lost son.

Luke 15

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But

we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I have to begin this morning by expressing my gratitude to a group of young men who did a really kind thing for me yesterday. I didn't really understand what they were doing at first, but I think it was good hearted. If you are not aware, yesterday was the Duke /UNC basketball game. This is the second year in a row that the final game of the season the Duke / UNC game landed on a Saturday where I was going to preach the following day and last year and this year those guys got together and did something very kind for me . They played so badly that I didn't have to watch the second half of the game and it gave me the opportunity to be more spiritual and to really focus on my sermon. So I'm really grateful for that and also for all of you who got on my facebook wall and shared your love for me and shared your excitement about good things going on in my life.

I want to begin this morning by sharing a poem with you. I'm not really a poetry guy. I was an English major and I feel like I should have liked poetry more than I ever did. But, every now and then there's a poem that kind of grabs me and this is one of those poems. It's by a guy named Frances Thompson. It was written in 1893 and it's called the *Hound of Heaven*. It's a great, great poem that has been incredibly influential in the lives of many, many people and it's a long poem.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,

And unperturbed pace,

Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

They beat - and a Voice beat

More instant than the Feet -

'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me'.

It's a beautiful poem and there's that refrain that comes again and again in the poem of the feet that followed after and that with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed and majestic instancy follow after this man.

The poem is Frances's story of his conversion experience. He didn't grow up a Christian and his experience is that God sort of hounded after him. That's where he gets that hound of heaven and through out the poem you get this sense of this seeking, the seeking, the seeking of God after him all the time. It's a beautiful image and I want to ask you to sort of hold that image in your head this morning as we talk. I think it's going to be important for us.

I said earlier that this parable of what we call the prodigal son or the two brothers or the lost son is a parable that, if you are like me, we have often misunderstood it. I want to tell you how I've always read that parable and it may sound familiar to you.

There was a man who had two sons and the younger son went to the father and said, "Father you are nothing but money to me and when you die I'm going to get some money and so if you were dead now, I could have that money and we could just not relate anymore. So how 'bout you give me my inheritance and you'll be dead to me and I'll be dead to you and I can go my own way." The father gives the son the

money he asks for, and the son goes off to a distant country. He squanders all that money on dissolute living and then he begins to be hungry because there is a famine and yet all of his money is gone. The son comes to himself and realizes what he has done with his life and he begins to have remorse and repent. He says, "I'm going to go back to my father and say, 'Father, I sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.'"

So the son, desiring to be reconciled to his father and filled with remorse and repentance goes back and his father, meets him on his way, and the son just begins to get those words of repentance out and the father immediately responds with this just overwhelming grace and welcomes him back home as his son. It's a great story. It's the way I've always heard that story.

There are just two problems with that story. The first problem is that it is really in contradiction to the two parables that come before it: the parable of the sheep and the coin. The bigger problem is that that is a great story, but it's not a Christian story. If we were Jewish or Muslim that would be a really perfect story for our faith. I don't think it works for us as Christians.

I think for us as Christians, central to our faith, central to our understanding of who we are and what it means to be Christian is this idea that Jesus became human and died for us and all of that happened while we were yet sinners. Jesus didn't wait until we had repented to give his life. He didn't wait until we came to him to atone for our sins. But all that happens before we come to know him.

We see that lived out really clearly in those first two parables. In the parable of the sheep that is lost, the man has a hundred sheep. When he loses one, he leaves the ninety nine and he goes and he finds the one sheep that is missing and brings it back and throws party. "*Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.*"

We see that with the woman and the lost coin. She's got ten coins, she loses one, she sweeps the house, she finds it and she throws a

party with all of her friends and it's the same way. *"Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

Here's the key. Repentance is critical, but the repentance always comes *after* God has sought us out. The repentance always comes after God has sought us out. You don't imagine that the sheep, as it's wandering from the fold says, "Gee, I've really made some mistakes and I repent and I'm going to go back to God the Shepherd." Or that the coin repents from being lost and wants to go back to the woman. The repentance happens but it happens after that party, after the experience of that grace of God.

So I want to retell the story of the prodigal in a little different way, the way I think we are supposed to hear it. The beginning of the story is exactly the same. There's a man who has two sons. One son goes to the father and says, "Father you are nothing but money to me. When you die I'll get some money. I kind of wish you were dead now. If you just give me the money we can go our separate ways." The father gives him what he asks. The son goes, he squanders his money. He begins to be hungry, he begins to be poor. And in the midst of his depravity and depravation, he comes to himself.

Now that phrase in Luke in the parable where he comes to himself is a phrase that shows up other places in the New Testament. One place that it shows up is in the book of Acts. There's a story where Peter has been arrested for proclaiming his faith and lies in prison. An angel comes and the angel escorts Peter out of the prison. It says though Peter is almost in a dream world, he's not really sure if what he is seeing is really happening or not. Then, when the angel gets him outside of the prison, the Bible says "he came to himself," the same Greek words that are used in this parable. Now Peter doesn't repent of being rescued by the angel. It's talking about a self awareness that he begins to understand where he is and what is going on.

That's what happens with this young man. It's not that he repents, but rather that he begins to be self aware, and he begins to realize

there is a way out of his predicament. He's motivated very clearly not by repentance, but by hunger. It says clearly, he's hungry, he wants food. What did he decide to do? He decides to go back to his father and, whatever words he's going to say about sin, his goal is to get food. His goal is essentially to get more money. This is not a story of the great repentance of the son or his life change. This is the same self-centered way that he has lived out his whole life.

Incidentally, as an aside, there is a story of a young man that goes to college and in the first few months he's at college he sends letters back to his father and he says, "Dad, college is so great, let me tell you all these stories of what is happening." At the end of every one of the stories at some point he says, "Dad, I could use a little bit more money, can you help me out?" As the son stays at college longer and longer and longer, those letters get shorter and shorter and shorter, but the sort of particulars stay the same until finally the father receives a letter from his son in college that says, "No mon, no fun, your son." To which the father sends a letter back, "So sad, too bad, your dad."

That's sort of the situation, right? He wants more money, so he goes back to his father, and he begins to spin this spiel of repentance. Maybe on some level it's true. But the father has been seeking him. The father meets him while he's still far off. Like the shepherd looking for the sheep, like the woman looking for the coin, the father has been seeking his son. When he finds him, he interrupts all this babble about what the son wants, and he makes him his son again. He responds with this extravagant, unexpected, overwhelming, undeserved love and grace.

And it's that experience of grace that leads the son to real repentance. It's that experience of grace that brings him into the party, into the Kingdom of God. This is critical for us because this is how our God works. He seeks us out. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," and he gives us his overwhelming, unexpected, extravagant, undeserved grace. And that's what leads us to repentance.

You begin to see a little bit why the older son is so upset. The older son has a lot of reasons to be upset, but one of those reasons is that the younger son comes back and doesn't have to do anything to get back into his father's good graces. Perhaps it would have been different if the younger son had come home and had spent a couple of months at the gate of the house in sack cloth and ashes, fasting and weeping and apologizing. Perhaps the older son would have felt differently, right? That's not how it works. The father meets him and immediately bestows this grace and love upon him, beyond anything he could have expected or imagined.

When you tell the story of your experience with God, do you tell that story as you seeking God out or him seeking you?

In Luke 19:10 at the end of the story about Zacchaeus, Jesus has what amounts to his mission statement in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus says, "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save those who are lost." That's the mission of Christ, and it is that he came to seek out and save those who are lost, those who are missing from his kingdom, from his love and his grace. What's your experience of God? What's your experience of that hound of heaven that pursued you? Perhaps he pursues you still with "unhurried chase and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy."

When people become members of our church, I often get the privilege of sitting down with them at some point and asking them to share their story and how they came to know God and their sort of faith back ground. About a year and a half ago, I had the privilege of sitting down with a young navy officer whom I asked that same question to. "How did you come to know Christ?"

She said, "Jim it's and interesting story. I didn't grow up in the church and didn't have any faith whatsoever until college. When I got to college, I was really busy with ROTC and my classes and I had all this stuff going on, but I remember just two weeks after I got to school, this guy came to my door. His name was Jeff and he was a good-looking guy, and he was friendly and fun to talk to. I thought, 'This is a good thing.'

“Jeff and I talked for a little while, and then finally Jeff said, ‘Are you interested in ever coming to this Bible study with me?’

“I thought, ‘Oh man, I thought this was a good thing...it's just about Bible study.’ ‘No thanks, Jeff. That’s neat, but that's not really for me. I don't really want to do that.’

“And Jeff said, ‘Ok, I understand but would it be OK if I ever came back again at some point and just see if you’re interested?’”

And just kind of to get rid of him at that point she said, "OK, yeah, I guess that's fine. I'm not going to come but..." So Jeff came back about a month later and then the month after that and the month after that and then the month after that. And in the midst of that, other people sort of showed up in her life, not related to Jeff, a guy named Fitz, a guy named Simon who kept inviting her to come to different Christian things.

Finally after about five or six months, sometime during the second semester of her freshman year, she got so fed up by being pursued by all these people she just said, "Hey, Jeff. I'll come to your stupid Bible study. I'm just going to come once. I just want to get it over with; I can say I did it. Like you know we can get this thing off..." So she went.

She said, “You know, it actually wasn’t so bad. I went again and again, and the summer came and I went home. I came back my sophomore year, and I went again and I went again and I went again. And, sometime the second semester of her sophomore year, she gave her life to Christ. She said,” Jim, it was so weird. It was like God was hounding after me and just wouldn't let me go.”

I said, “Yes, that's how it is when God hounds after us sometimes.”

One of my favorite stories in the early church is the story about a man named Ambrose. Ambrose was a politician who lived in four hundred AD in the Roman Empire. He grew up in a Christian home. He was a catechumen which meant he grew up in the faith. On some

level he believed, but he never made the decision to be baptized. There are some theological reasons for that, but basically he hadn't gone "all in. "

Ambrose was governor of a region that included the city of Milan. The Bishop of Milan had just died and there was a lot of conflict in that city. Ambrose went to the church in that city as their governor essentially to say, "Calm down, chill out, everything is going to be okay. We'll get somebody new, just give it time." So he's in this church giving this speech to people just encouraging them to be peaceful, be good citizens.

In the midst of his speech, somebody in the back of the church started chanting, "Ambrose, Bishop." Then there came another voice, and another voice and another voice and pretty soon the whole church is chanting, "Ambrose, Bishop. Ambrose, Bishop." They elected him on the spot to be Bishop of that city.

There were two problems with this. The first problem was that he hadn't been baptized so he couldn't be Bishop. The second problem was he didn't have any desire in the world to be Bishop. So he did what any rational person would have done: he ran away. He ran away to the country and hid with some wealthy friends. But people wouldn't give it up; they kept looking for him. No kidding, it got to the point where the Roman Emperor issued an edict proclaiming him as Bishop and threatening dire retribution on anybody who kept him from getting his new post.

At that point the folks that were hiding (or hosting him) decided it wasn't worth it anymore, and they turned him over. And he's almost forcibly dragged to the baptismal font and baptized; and eight days later he's anointed Bishop of Milan. He ends up being one of the foremost theologians of the western church: St. Ambrose. He transforms Christendom, but his story is so clearly the story of God hounding after him.

What's your experience with God? What's your experience of being sought by God?

One of my favorite hymns *Come the Fount of Every Blessing* has a line in it, "Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God. He rescued me from danger interposed his precious blood."

What's your story?

I guess the next question for me is what does that seeking look like? Is there a way that we can be involved in that work of a God who seeks? There's a book called the *Outsider Interviews*. It's a good book. It's a group of young twenty-something folks who are outsiders, who are un-churched. Some Christians went around and interviewed them and said, "Just tell us about your experience in the church."

I want to play just a little clip from one of those outsider interviews:

"When people have talked to me about being saved or whatever that's all they do is preach at me. They never listen to my side of things and they just want to shovel all these scriptures down my throat. Since I was raised Jewish, I never understood where Jesus fit into Christianity and I feel like when I go and I try to go to church instead of trying to explain to me what Jesus is and how he works in the whole system of things, its just THIS is it and there's no other way."

Interviewer: "When Christians tend to evangelize and get someone saved even if they don't do it in a great way they tend to mean well ... it's a loving thing. How do you feel about someone trying to get you to be saved?"

"It's like the only people who have come to my door and give me a pamphlet and I appreciate that more than when I would go to church with my step dad and they would tell me that I had lived my life horribly and that the devil is in me 'cause that doesn't come across to me as love."

"I guess I never had anybody like truly act like they truly loved me and wanted to save me...."

So, I guess there's a right way and a wrong way to be a part of God's seeking, right? That story of Clarissa: she has a fantastic story that tells us some stuff that's helpful as we think about not just being sought, but how we might be part of God's seeking. She suggests that we need to be listening as much as we're talking. When we talk we need to say things in a way that makes sense, not use coded language. And she suggests that we need to feel loving.

But Clarissa talks a lot in her interviews about being judged and feeling this overwhelming condemnation from the church. She shares in another place more of her story and why she has had that experience.

When Clarissa was twenty three she had probably the darkest period of her life. Her father passed away and after her father died she became addicted to alcohol and then addicted to more serious narcotics. In the midst of all those addictions and all that destruction, she had a relationship with a man for about a month that was largely inconsequential in the larger scheme of her life except that she got pregnant.

So she started talking to her friends who were Christian and non Christian and she started asking what she should do. Though she got a lot of advice and all of her friends were consistent in telling her she should keep the baby, she decided the best course of action for her was to have an abortion.

Clarissa shares that she had a friend that was a strong, strong Christian who was very pro-life, who made it very clear what her opinions were on this issue. But this friend also said, "I will not abandon you." This friend said, "You know what I think, but whatever happens, you know I'll be there for you. I'm not going to disown you."

Clarissa ended up calling this friend, and she was the only person she could get who would literally drive her to the clinic and drive her home. She was the shoulder that she cried on for three weeks

afterward. Clarissa went on to say that that friend is the only reason she remains open to Christ to this day.

I heard that story and I thought, "I don't know. I don't know if I could do that." Then, as I was reading this week the story of the prodigal son, something struck me that guess I'd never thought about before. It was something weird that I sort of have always read past and ignored.

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them." Why did he do that? Why did the father divide his property? He didn't have to divide his property. He knew his son, at the very least, wasn't going to take what he was given and use it well. He had to know that all the money that his son was going to get was going to end up just leading his son into more and more darkness. Why did he equip him in that way?

I don't know that I know the answer, but I've been thinking about it a lot. I wonder if part of the reason is that the father in his own heart said, "No matter what else, I will not disown you. Even if you disown me, even if you don't want me to be your father you will always be my son." Maybe the father was already seeking the son even at that point, already seeking the son, already trying to overwhelm him with that extravagant, unexpected, undeserved love and grace. Maybe that's what Clarissa's friend is trying to do, too.

So how about you? How are you involved in the seeking? Whether it's at the end of the process--the fun part where the son comes home and the father gets to welcome him home and his life changes – or whether it's maybe the not as fun part at the beginning when the son wants to go and the father says, "No matter what else, I will not disown you. I will keep seeking you out." How are you involved in the seeking?

There was a Barna statistic a number of years ago. The Barna Group did an actual survey among unchurched adults, and they said that

twenty-five percent of the un-churched would attend church if a friend ever took the time or made the effort to invite them. Think of that for a second. One fourth of all non-Christians said that they would come to church if a friend ever took the time or made the effort to invite them. That's extraordinary!

I'm thinking a lot about this parable and it's a great story. But it doesn't end on an up note. It's kind of a downer of a parable because the end of the parable isn't the party like the other Jew parables end with. The parable is also the story of the elder brother.

The elder brother's story is harsh. He comes in from the field where he has been working and, when he finds out what's going on, he refuses to go into the party. His father comes out and begins to plead with him, to seek him. *"But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!'"*

I read that story and I think, "Gosh, I'm really in danger of being that guy. I look at my life and I think I try really hard to work for God. I fill up my time with churchy things, and I do Bible reading, and I go to worship, and I taught youth, and I taught Sunday school, and I do mission trips, and all this good stuff. I'm working really hard for God to do his stuff to keep his church going, and I think I'm trying really hard to obey his commands. I'm not doing a perfect job, but at least I know that's my goal. And I'm working at it, and I'm trying so hard to obey his commands.

The older brother is doing the same thing, and I realize that the elder brother is nowhere. The elder brother has totally missed his father's heart. The older brother ends up outside the party because he doesn't care about the things that his father cares about. The father didn't want the other brother working just to keep the church stuff running; he didn't want the elder brother to just be trying to be a

good person. He wanted him to be part of the search. He wanted him to be out there looking for his brother. He wanted him to be out there seeking as he was seeking. He wanted him to care about the same things that he cared about.

It's a hard story, but at the end of it the younger brother is in the party and the elder brother is outside. That we might miss the Kingdom of Heaven just because we miss this one thing: our Father's heart for the lost...it's a scary thing for me.

I would suggest that perhaps the only way that we can avoid being the elder brother is to live into being the younger. The only way that we can avoid being the elder brother is to live into being the younger, is to recognize that we are not here because we are good people. We're not here because we've got it together or because at one point in our life we came to ourselves and repented and came back and said, "Hey, I screwed up. Gee, if I can do it why can't he do it? "

We're here because God sought us out. Were here because "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" and that overwhelming, unexpected, undeserved love of God came to us and led us to repentance. Were here because we know we are not good enough and God loves us anyway. If we really get that idea that God has sought us out, perhaps we'll want to be part of the search, too. Perhaps we'll want to be people who are out there with our God seeking out those who are lost and missing from his kingdom.

I want to end with the end of Frances Thompsons's poem. It's a reminder of the way God sought him and his own unworthiness. It's a great reminder for me of what Christ has done for me.

'And human love needs human meriting:

How hast thou merited -
Of all man's clotted clay the dingiest clot?
Alack, thou knowest not
How little worthy of any love thou art!

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee,

Save Me, save only Me?
All which I took from thee I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand, and come!
Halts by me that footfall:
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He Whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.

Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we confess today that we are so unworthy of your love. We are so thankful that you have sought us out and claimed us. We pray, Lord, that you would use us today to be part of the ongoing seekers of the missing of this world. We pray that our hearts would be aligned to yours. We pray, Lord, that we would have the overwhelming privilege of sharing the good news that you love us and that "while we were yet sinners, you died for us." We pray, Father, that we might be welcomed into that eternal celebration. We pray that we might experience your hand out stretched caressingly to us today. "Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest I am he whom thou sleekest!" Thanks be to you. Amen.

