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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19)
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Lectionary Year C: Luke 15:1-10

When something happens that is quickly known around the globe, particularly with important people or in important places, today's media offers an almost nonstop offering of coverage, regardless of whether there are any new developments or not. Twenty-one years ago today, I awoke that morning on the couch in my parents' basement to the images of jet airliners flying into the World Trade Center. The television had been left on from the night before; I know I had been watching NBC because I remember baffled and distressed Today show personalities trying to report what had just happened. From that moment onward, watching TV was literally watching history -- a very tragic history -- unfold before my eyes.

Something similar happened this past Thursday, although one might note that the news wasn't nearly as distressing, when the death of Queen Elizabeth the Second was announced. But I noticed that, as twenty-one years have passed, I don't have nearly as much time for the viewing of television or other media as I once had! Keep in mind that, on September 11th, 2001, I was unemployed. But in the case of Queen Elizabeth, she is the only reigning British monarch I've ever known...until September 8th, 2022. I'm not alone in this, either. One would have to be well into one's seventies to have any meaningful memory of another British monarch, as King George the Sixth died in February of 1952. Undoubtedly, the media will continue to provide ample coverage related to the Queen's death and legacy, as well as to the upcoming transition in the mon-

archy with the coronation of King Charles the Third. (Just saying "King Charles the Third" is going to take some getting used to!)

But we're the church, and, more importantly, the church in the United States of America, a nation that recognizes no official religion and, at its founding, fought for freedom from the British Crown. As Episcopalians, we're in the rather peculiar position of being, essentially, the American branch of the Church of England, of which the British Monarch is the supreme governor. So, for example, if I were to become a priest in the Church of England or in the church of any Commonwealth nation in the Anglican Communion, I would have to swear allegiance to the British Monarch. (I always thought this would be a bit hard to swallow if I transferred to the Anglican Church of Canada, even though, in many cases, I'd be closer to home in terms of physical distance.) And even though the Episcopal Church became its own church after the American Revolution, I can't help but think that a few loyalists were a part of our fellowship throughout it all...and beyond. One little way this is evident is in the occasional use of British English spelling and grammar in the Prayer Book -- not so much in the 1979 but more so in the 1928. Why would that little bit of apparent Anglophilia present itself like that? One can only wonder...

Perhaps an even greater thought exercise -- in light of our Christian faith -- would be to consider the meaning and application of status, particularly when status is evaluated within the context of Jesus' teaching and example. It would seem that Jesus doesn't have a lot of time for monarchs and other earthly rulers, including those who represent an established religion. When we speak in terms of faith, it's safe to say that status doesn't matter. A king

or a queen is just as accountable before his or her God as a commoner, and, correspondingly, God does not hold a king or a queen in higher regard than a commoner. How do we know this? Well, we're taught this directly by Christ himself; in fact, he went out of his way to be among the lowly and outcast -- the opposite of kings and queens. In this morning's Gospel text, we read, "The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:2). Right here, we can see that Jesus does little to honor or humor people of status; maybe if he'd been a bit more politically savvy, he would've attempted to warm up to the Pharisees and the scribes...but no. They've already received all the attention they needed, and now, all those who had previously been overlooked and rejected get to experience some of God's grace and mercy.

Status, of course, draws attention to who and what is "important," and it may be just fine to use air quotes in this context, because we know that the only One who is truly important is God. With all other things, Jesus reminds us that the littlest and seemingly most inconsequential have value equal to everything else. One lost sheep out of a hundred or one lost coin out of ten are worth searching for because their value is equal to that of all the others. It would be very callous to think of some being replaceable and others not, so why should anyone regard actual human beings that way? The lost and the least -- whom Jesus came to serve -- are not replaceable and are, in fact, just as beloved and precious in God's sight as the "important" people, if not more so!

So, when we look around our community and wider world, what are some general rules that we can follow? Judging by what we can glean from our Gospel text, we might want to, first, evaluate who's most likely to fall through the

cracks. Who are the lost and the least? And, at St. Anne's, we have ways of doing that, for example, when we identify persons who will receive Thanksgiving baskets in November, and, at other times, people identify themselves. I don't think that's exactly rocket science! But then, you and I both can see persons in our own midst who appear well-heeled and well-adjusted, and yet have no idea that they're hurting...and may be ashamed to admit it. Would such persons still be counted among the ninety-nine righteous persons who, as Jesus says, need no repentance, or consolation, or healing? Probably not, because Jesus would ask that they have the humility to seek help. Humility is what Jesus saw lacking in people who thought they had it all together. And status is no guard against the perils of being human (although wealth may enable some folks to hide that a little better).

Earthly rulers -- whether they be kings, queens, presidents, or prime ministers -- must toe fine lines of both humility and dignity, lest they become perceived as superhuman or entirely too human. By my modest estimation, few heads of state toed this line better than Queen Elizabeth the Second. I'm no defender of the institution of royal families, but when moments arose when the world seemed like it was spinning out of control, the Queen, with a few words, could bring everyone a sense of relief. Her ability to do this had to have had something to do with seeing her native country bombed to smithereens (in places) when she was still a teenager, and then coming out of that experience with a perspective that allowed her to face great challenges and tragedies with aplomb. In the United States, we often looked to the Greatest Generation, of which Elizabeth would also be a member, for that stability and resolve. It goes without saying that the world could use that again...

But today, we remember, too, that our heavenly Ruler, our Lord, chooses us even when we do not choose him. We are the lost sheep whom he has found -- the sinners who have found redemption. In fact, we have been set free from sin -- that horrible dis-ease that separated us from God -- and made holy by the blood of Christ the King. And if you're not feeling that deep down inside, please have the humility to reach out for repentance, or consolation, or healing. From that point, if you are thereby restored, you may now consider yourself free to, as we say in our Dismissal, "go and peace to love and serve the Lord." Today is a special day, too, in that regard, as you will find in Rose Hall many opportunities to serve your church and wider community, with the understanding that these things can be your offering of thanksgiving for what God has done for you.

God has found you and identified you to go forth in his Name, bearing his redemption -- without regard for status, apart from those whose status is no status at all. Kings and queens may command our honor, but the lost and the least command our attention. Ninety-nine kings and queens are no more important than one lost sheep.

Amen.