

Keeping the Lamp of the Affordable Care Act Lit

The parable in Luke 15:8-10 has to be one of the shortest Jesus shared with his listeners.

It's the one about the woman who loses one of her 10 coins and scours her residence to find it.

When the lost coin is found, she calls together her friends and neighbors and they celebrate the restoration of a tenth of her assets - a tenth of her livelihood.

"Rejoice with me," she says in the invitation, "for I have found the coin that I had lost."

Jesus likens this to the joy the angels experience in God's neighborhood when one sinner repents.

Typically, the story is told in a way that commends the woman for her diligence - for "sweeping the house" and "searching carefully" until she finds the lost coin. What often gets overlooked is the first thing the woman does in this parable.

Before anything else, she has the good sense to light the lamp. That's key to the eventual success of her hunt and not to be taken for granted since peasant homes in ancient Palestine were usually windowless.

How could she find that which was so crucial to her well-being if there was no light? What chances of finding the lost coin did she have if she had to fumble around the residence in the dark?

Today, there are numerous attempts to take away the lamp.

Take, for example, what is happening in Brown County, Wis., where Green Bay is the county seat for 245,000-plus residents and 57,500-plus families.

In terms of economic health, Brown County does better than other areas of the state. It has a poverty rate of only 7.3 percent (compared with 16.7 percent for Milwaukee County.)

Brown County Supervisor Brad Hopp, however, wants to make sure that people who need health insurance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) don't have the benefit of the public library to access information about the provisions of the new law or how to enroll.

In effect, Hopp wants to take away the lamp that would allow residents of Brown County, who have lost or never had health insurance, to find it.

In early August, he proposed an ordinance that would disallow any county employees, including those in the eight branches of the Brown County Library, from using the county's resources to help residents find out about the ACA.

"We do not have the resources - financially, administratively or expertise-wise," he [claimed](#).

A licensed health insurance agent in the area, Jason Wisneski, agreed: "I can tell you with certainty that it is absolute lunacy for any government workers, let alone librarians, to try to assist consumers in making a major medical insurance purchasing decision."

The director of the Brown County Library wants to keep the lamp, which is the library, available to any resident: "Our responsibility is to provide information to people who need it."

She explains that it's no different than the library sharing information about how to apply for unemployment benefits.

The problem of taking away the lamp is serious enough - not just in Brown County, Wis., but across the nation - that the president of the American Library Association released a public statement in mid-July about the role of libraries in relation to the new health care policy.

“Just as our communities turn to libraries for help to learn about citizenship and passport requirements, use public access computers to get disaster relief information, and obtain assistance with copyright and patent questions, we expect libraries will receive many inquiries from the public about the Affordable Care Act,” the [statement](#) read. “As always, libraries do not promote specific programs or points of view, but provide the public with balanced, unbiased access to information.”

It’s a lamp-like function. Critical, that is, for finding what has been lost or, until now, unavailable. This is not all that different than providing the funding for the new health care program, which other government officials are so intent on denying.

The healing of body and mind was an integral a part of Jesus’ ministry. So it stands to reason that followers of Jesus should have a stake in keeping the lamp of mental and physical healing available.

After all, who among those disciples of Jesus would want to deny the angels a cause to rejoice, to say nothing of the families and friends in Brown County, Wis., and across the nation who will soon have the health care that has been unavailable to them?

Keep the lamps in place and keep them lit!

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