

Pentecost 8A: Proper 12

July 30, 2017

Ken Wratten at St Luke's

1 Kings 3:5-12

Solomon asks for an understanding mind

Romans 8:26-39

We are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, called, justified, glorified.

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 Parables of mustard seed, leaven, treasure, pearl, fishing net

Madeleine L'Engle; 'Jesus was not a theologian. He was God who told stories.'

You and I, as followers of Jesus Christ, are invited to live in the Kingdom of God. Since we are invited to be residents of that Kingdom, it is worth our learning what we can about the neighborhood. First, where might we look for it? The Gospel parables suggest that the extraordinary is hidden in plain sight; in the ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.

Barbara Brown Taylor wrote; ' "If we want to speak of heavenly things... we may begin by speaking about earthly things, and if we want to describe that which is beyond all words, we may begin with words we know, words like: man, woman, field, seed, bird, air, yeast, bread; words like: pearl, net, sea, fish, joy. The kingdom is like these things; the kingdom is found in these things. These are the places to look for the will and rule and presence of God."

Mustard seed and yeast teach that amazing results come from seemingly insignificant beginnings.

I reflect on my own journey from Boy Scouts, radio merit badge, crystal radio, ham radio, electrical engineering, move to CA, people management, project management, access to a seminary within commute distance, serving at a San Jose parish where I started up a preschool. All of this brought together a pretty broad mix of experiences and skills needed for where St Luke's is today. Small details that set the course for my life. Think of the path that brought you to this community, to this church, to this base camp for your own ministry.

The parables of the treasure hidden in a field, and the jewel merchant who searches for and finds a great pearl, teach that our awareness of the Kingdom of God – our awareness of the presence of God in our life - can happen by chance or by focused searching; either way, that awareness of God reshapes our priorities, and it is to be prized above anything else. So what is your pearl? What is so important to you that it holds the power to shape your priorities?

Consider the power to shift priorities that comes from AA, Cursillo, building a habit of prayer (breath prayer), practicing the command to Love Your Neighbor, or developing a personal Rule of Life. Consider the reshaped priorities that come from deciding to bring joy to the children at Chamberlains Children's Home; and

committing to make Sunday the day to meet here - to share worship together. Do these experiences hold the power to reshape your priorities?

The parable of the fishermen who cast out a net teaches that God alone is the One to oversee judgment, and it will happen in God's time. We need to learn to let go, and let God. We need to learn how to deal with, work with, and honor EGR people. We need to try our best to NOT be the EGR person in the group.

Paul wrote of a Kingdom-focused life: NOTHING is more important than our realizing God's love for us whom He has predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ; and being predestined, we are called; and justified; and glorified.

Knowing the intensity of that love changes us. And so Paul challenges us to be who we are called to be; practicing the presence of God, living a life focused on God's Kingdom.

We learn from the mustard seed and the yeast to trust that even the tiniest events or actions in life can yield great results. Living in the Kingdom is full of adventure and joyful surprises - like finding a hidden treasure. Living in the Kingdom is worth infinitely more than anything we can imagine—like the pearl of great price. And even though we might run into some 'hard to work with' companions (weeds), and a share of disappointments along the way (inedible fish)—we can be confident that it is *God's* task, not ours, to sort this all out; because the Kingdom will prevail in the end.

The invitation to be residents of God's Kingdom requires you to:

- Notice the signs of God being present in your day, even in the very smallest ways. Look beyond the chaos reported in the world news.
- Notice how your experiences shift the course of your life, bringing change that produces blessings. (It might be measured in years or decades!)
- Notice the qualities in people, even the very well hidden qualities, and recognize the gift of inner peace that comes with leaving judgments to God.

Now we have three new insights from everyday, earthly things that help us recognize the Kingdom of God; worth any price to live there – worth any price / to have that life in this place, here, now. Amen.