

## **Pentecost 8**

### **July 26, 2020**

#### 1 Kings 3:5-12

<sup>5</sup>At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." <sup>6</sup>And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. <sup>7</sup>And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup>And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. <sup>9</sup>Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

<sup>10</sup>It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup>And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup>behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.

#### Psalms 119:129-136

<sup>129</sup> Your decrees are wonderful;\*

therefore I obey them with all my heart.

<sup>130</sup> When your word goes forth | it gives light;\*

it gives understanding | to the simple.

<sup>131</sup> I open my | mouth and pant;\*

I long for | your commandments.

<sup>132</sup> Turn to | me in mercy, \*

as you always do to those who | love your name.

133 Steady my footsteps | in your word;\*

let no iniquity have dominion | over me.

134 Rescue me from those | who oppress me,\*

and I will keep | your commandments.

135 Let your countenance shine up- | on your servant\*

and teach | me your statutes.

136 My eyes shed | streams of tears,\*

because people do not | keep your law.

### Romans 8:26-39

<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because<sup>[g]</sup> the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup>And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,<sup>[h]</sup> for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be<sup>[i]</sup> against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.<sup>[j]</sup> <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor

things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### Matthew 13:31-34, 44-52

<sup>31</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

<sup>34</sup> All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.

<sup>44</sup> "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup> who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

### **Message: What If?**

Most of the gospel lessons during the season after Pentecost present us with the day-to-day teachings of Jesus. They're not about extraordinary events

in his life or special festivals of the church; instead they seek to present us with what the Church often refers to as "ordinary time". They give us a look into the routine day of the disciples as they followed Jesus from town to town and listened as he taught.

Much of Jesus' teaching was done through the use of the literary form known as parables. It was so common for Jesus to employ this technique that our gospel lesson this morning suggests that that was his primary, if not sole, method of teaching: *"All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable."*

Using metaphor and imagery, parables seek to engage the listener by inviting them into the story through association with one or more of the characters presented. Occasionally, Jesus would explain his stories by sharing with his listeners who the characters represented. A perfect example was the parable from last week about the weeds in the wheat. When asked by his disciples for an explanation, Jesus goes through the story role by role and identifies who is symbolized by each character. Another excellent example of Jesus identifying the roles is the gospel parable about the Sower and the different soils into which the Seed of the Word of God falls.

But these instances of being told how to interpret the parable, although well known, are rather rare. More often than not, the story is left open-ended and we as listeners are free to meditate and reflect on the story and do some free association. Most often we're left to identify ourselves in the story and then reflect on the consequences to which that role or character leads.

This morning's gospel text presents us with a series of five short parables. The first two describe the kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed and its resultant shrub and leaven which causes an entire mass of flour to rise. Both of these offer minimal opportunities for free association because there is only one role in each and it is identified as the Kingdom of Heaven in both cases. We are invited to reflect on the implications of the metaphor, but there is no specific role open for us to adopt. The most common take-away from the first two stories is to reflect on how such mighty things God can bring about from such quiet, humble, modest beginnings.

One of the parables this morning was essentially a re-telling of last week's story of the weeds and wheat growing up in the same field, but this week uses the imagery of good and bad fish in the same net. In both cases, Jesus tells us, it will be angels at the end of the age who do the sorting out of the good and the bad.

That leaves us with two more parables this morning: the story of the hidden treasure and the story of the fine pearl. It is important to note that Jesus offers us no interpretation key or role assignments for either of these stories. Hence, we under no obligation to necessarily assume one role over another.

That being said, the most typical way we have come to understand these stories is to have assumed that the "treasure" of the first story and the "fine pearl" of the second are both "heaven". That leaves you and I to be the fortunate person who discovers the treasure and/or the merchant who's been searching for that pearl of great price. In both cases, the "moral" of the story becomes something like: "Heaven is really valuable! Go and do whatever it takes to acquire it, even if you have to sell all that you have in order to get it!"

All that sounds OK on the surface, but if we really reflect on it, we'll see some pretty big problems begin to surface. What's the problem? It's that over and over the scriptures, the creeds of the church, and our confessions continually teach that attaining heaven or obtaining our salvation is completely out of our reach! There is nothing that can be done to acquire them! The radicle efforts by the men in the stories, though commendable are, according to scripture, totally useless! There is nothing we can do to gain for ourselves that pearl or that treasure!

But what if we allow the scriptures to introduce some precedent that might offer a different perspective? A few weeks ago we heard Jesus tell us in chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel that we are not to be afraid because the very hairs on our heads are numbered and we're more valuable than many sparrows! OK...how much more valuable?

When it came time in God's great cosmic plan for Him to redeem us as fallen, sinful, broken, rebellious creatures, what did he use? A couple sparrows? A couple hundred sparrows? What do the Scriptures, the Creeds, and our Lutheran Confessions tell us?

The Scriptures, in the gospel of Luke declares "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." And in 1 Peter 1 we hear: "We were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ!"

The ancient creeds of the church declare: "For us and for our salvation, He came down!"

In the Explanation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed, our Small catechism teaches that "Jesus Christ has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person.

He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil...”.

What if...what if we not the one seeking the treasure at all? What if we are the treasure? What if, in the eyes of the God of all that is, seen and unseen, we puny human creatures are valued and prized so highly that he would be willing to give up all that he had to go and acquire us? What if God sees us as so priceless that he'll get us back if it kills him?

The Good News is that is exactly what the kingdom of heaven is all about! God's kingdom is not about our diligent searching for what we deem valuable and then doing everything in *our* power to obtain it. It's about God the Father who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all; it's about Christ Jesus, who sees us as so priceless that he'll get us back if it kills him; it's about Jesus who in his joy gave up everything he had: his glory, his power, his throne, his life, all so that he could come and buy us back!

And when through the power of the Holy Spirit who calls us through the Gospel, enlightens us with his gifts we begin to understand all these things, we begin to be able to bring out from the treasure of the holy scriptures old stories with new meanings so that we are trained for the kingdom of heaven.

Thanks be to God!

### **Prayers of the Church, 8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 26, 2020**

Let us lift our hearts, hands, and voices in prayer to God on behalf of all people.

*A brief silence is kept.*

Dear Father, thank you for your Word and the Sacraments. We pray that you would make the Church lovely with Jesus' goodness. May it always treat your Word and Sacraments as precious, living treasures, not as dusty relics. By the gracious power of your Spirit, draw many to faith in Jesus, so they may never be separated from your love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our persecuted sisters and brothers, who face "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword." Make them more than conquerors through the Cross of Christ; and soften the hearts of those who torment them.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Keep this congregation in your care, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love for us in Christ Jesus. Use our words and deeds to share that love with those around us who need it most.

Lord, in your mercy, ***hear our prayer.***

Establish your justice among the nations, O Lord; and do not let the scepter of evil hold sway over us. Establish your justice among rulers of countries and captains of industry; among leaders in every field of inquiry and endeavor; and among your people everywhere. Turn our hearts from evildoing and crooked ways; and fix them firmly upon faith toward you and fervent love toward one another.

Lord, in your mercy, ***hear our prayer.***

We pray for justice, concord, and safety to flourish in this land. We pray for wrongdoers to be held accountable for their deeds, and to repent of them. We pray for wise words, not inflamed rhetoric, from our leaders. We pray for constructive decisions, not rash actions or empty gestures, from those entrusted with authority. We pray for those who risk their lives on behalf of others, that even in difficult circumstances they exhibit integrity and valor. We pray that in all circumstances, your will be done.

Lord, in your mercy, ***hear our prayer.***

We pray for the sick, injured, dying and bereaved; for the troubled, confused, lonely, or despairing; and for everyone who struggles with the tribulations of this life – especially Dallas & Mary Rathe, Marilyn Fredrick, Rosemary Pelvatier, Terri Gould, Xavier Roach, the VansCoy family, Pastor David Steffenson, and Pastor James Puotyual. Help us to show them, in word and deed, that though the world seems against them, you are for them; you love them; you justify them; and you shall indeed make them more than conquerors.

Lord, in your mercy, ***hear our prayer.***

Most Holy Father, we remember before you our departed loved ones. Remember your faithfulness and loving-kindness to us, though we are in the thousandth generation of those whom you have named as your own. Teach us to eagerly seek and dearly treasure your Son, our Pearl of great price. Whatever trials we endure in this life, grant that blessed outcome promised to all who love you. In your great mercy, bring us into your Kingdom. There, with all the redeemed, may we rejoice in your love and delight in you forever.

Lord, in your mercy, ***hear our prayer.***