

# Sermon: Pentecost 8

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July 30, 2017

Year A

1 Kings 3:5-12

Psalm 119:129-136

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Two weeks ago... Jesus began to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven... when we read the parable about the sower who cast seed on four kinds of soil... the path... the rocky ground... among thorns... and on good soil... I said that while we're tempted to wonder which kind of soil we are... the truth is that we each contain all four kinds of soil... and when we receive the seeds of God's Word... they may germinate but then wither... or they may take root but fall away when there is some challenge... or they may be choked by the cares and lures of the world... or perhaps they thrive in the good soil and bear fruit... in other words... at different times we may act differently...

Last week... when we read the parable about the weeds and the wheat... I suggested that while we're tempted to wonder which one we are... the truth is that we can be both... and sometimes participate... unwittingly... in the worldly forces of division and accusation... which work against God's intent... forces which can lull us into dualistic thinking... instead of the Wisdom of unitive experience...

Today... we hear about Solomon who took the Pharaoh's daughter in marriage... and while *his* house... and *God's* house... the Temple... and the wall around Jerusalem... were being built... Solomon offered sacrifice at Gibeon... and God came to Solomon in a dream... and said... *Tell me what you want...* and Solomon said... *Give me Wisdom... so I can know the difference between good and evil... without it... how can I possibly govern your people...* God was pleased that Solomon didn't ask for long life... or riches... or the death of his enemies... and because of this... in the next two verses... God says... but I'll also give you what you didn't ask for... if you will walk in my ways... and keep my commandments... I'll also give you riches and honor... such that no other king shall compare with you... and I will lengthen your life...

God asked Solomon to do... what the prophet Micah asks all of us to do... *He has told you... mortal... what is good... to do justice... and love kindness... and walk humbly with your God...* and this idea of humility isn't false humility... it's not minimizing our gifts... it's not refusing to acknowledge our strengths... but it's knowing who we are... knowing fully who we are... being fully awake... because Solomon's Wisdom is not just for Kings...

John Shea... who you have to know by now... is one of my spiritual mentors... wrote... there are stories about people who come back from retreats... from mountaintops... disguised as retreat centers... and you'd swear they came back enlightened... they are centered... and feel able to face the tests of the world with steady justice and compassion... until their mother comes to visit... or until they park their car in highway traffic... and lean on the horn... and sing a hymn that's not in any worship book... he wrote... we all move from moments of realization and centeredness into scattered and fractured behavior... we think we're in charge... able to bring love into the situations in our lives... and then we get our buttons pushed...

As an example... in John 13:37... Peter says to Jesus... *I will lay down my life for you...* and in John 15:13... Jesus says... *No one has greater love than this... to lay down one's life for one's friends...* but Peter's inflated sense of fidelity will not weather the challenge of upcoming events... he denies he even knows Jesus three times...

And we are like Peter... and those who come down from retreat centers... and we can be like those who receive good seed into our thorniness... so the changes and chances of the world... or the lure of wealth... choke the Word...

But today... the Gospel is awash in hope... the Kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a great shrub... the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast... that a woman took... and hid... *the Greek is translated as mixed... but it really means hid...* in sixty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened... the Kingdom of Heaven is like

found treasure... and you're willing to sell all you have... to own it... it's like looking... for years... in antique shops... for that one piece of Roseville pottery... to replace the vase that was accidentally broken... in your last move... and spending more than you may think warranted... but you know you can restore wholeness to what has become fragmented and you can't pass up the opportunity... and the Kingdom is like weedy fish... and wheaty fish... that are harvested together... and once you've got them all... you can discard those you'd never serve at your Heavenly Banquet...

He asked... *Have you understood all this?* and they all answered... *Yes!*... I wish I was as confident... and he said... *If so... you are obligated to bring out of your household... Wisdom's new insights... and Wisdom that has withstood the test of time...*

But here's the thing... the mustard seed is not the Kingdom... and neither is the bush... the yeast is not the Kingdom... and neither is the leavened flour... the Kingdom isn't the treasure or the field... though perhaps we find the Kingdom by stumbling across it... the Kingdom isn't the pearl... or the place or person where it was found... but perhaps we find the Kingdom in the searching...

All of today's parables... everything that Jesus has thrown around... has *parabled* around... like the cook who throws spaghetti at the ceiling to see whether it will stick... all of these parables tell us that there is no single image... linguistic convention... or paradigm... that can faithfully and fully represent God's realm... we are four different kinds of soil... we are wheat and we are weeds... we are enlightened after our mountaintop experience... and then mom calls... we are Peter... committing to lay down our life for Jesus... and then denying we even know him...

And as we grow in Wisdom... as we reflect on these parables... the new treasure we can bring out... the new insight... is to understand God's Kingdom as transformation... Jesus describes God's Kingdom as transformation... seed to bush... yeast to bread... and discovering and sifting treasure... like sifting through the net... and knowing what to keep... and what to discard...

As The Rev. Barbara Crafton said... Jesus is a person... and at the same time... a process... Jesus is the Son of God... but he is also "The Way"... he's the goal and the means... we want the "person" of Jesus as our "God totem"... but we really don't want his message of "descent"... except as a theology of atonement... we want to think that this is what Jesus needed to do to "save us"... but we don't want to see the cross as the pattern for our life... or a path for our own liberation... we prefer heavenly transactions to our own transformation...

The Kingdom of Heaven upsets the apple cart... messes with the *status quo*... turns things upside down... because it seems to ask so much of us... but it is as close to us as our own breath... Solomon asked for Wisdom... his moral compass led him to God... and God knows most leaders would have asked for riches... or the lives of their enemies... or long life for themselves... and it can be daunting to get... or keep... our bearings as the Kingdom unfolds... but the Talmud says... *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it...*

When Jesus asks us... *Have you understood all this?* Will we be able to say... *Yes!*... and if so... what old and new Wisdom do we bring out of our households... and more importantly... how do we act on it?

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