

SEVENTENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; 2020

We have had a lot of Kingdom imagery over the past three Sundays, and we have heard through the medium of parables what the Kingdom can be likened to. To briefly recap, we have been taught by Jesus that the Kingdom is like the Sower who scatters good seed liberally and without discrimination. Then he likened the Kingdom to the Sower who showed enormous tolerance and patience in leaving the good wheat grow alongside the weeds until both had time to complete their natural end. We also had the Kingdom like a tree that is a safe haven for rest and safety for those who alight on its branches, the Kingdom like yeast that leavens the bread thus becoming a positive life giving force, the Kingdom like a dragnet that carries the same meaning as the wheat and the weeds and finally the Kingdom like a treasure and a pearl whose immense value is a thing to give everything up for.

However the Kingdom is described by analogy or metaphor through story or parable, Jesus is always referring to that one thing that draws them all together; the Kingdom is the place, the domain of God, it is the place where God is experienced in all His fullness, and if it is the place where God is met in all His divine glory then Jesus is making a statement about Himself. In pointing to the Kingdom, the parables are pointing to Jesus as the Kingdoms true manifestation. Think back to the ministry of St John the Baptist. He came to prepare a way for the Lord, and why should he prepare a way? Because the Kingdom of God was breaking in, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is upon you," John says. The Kingdom arrives in the person of Jesus.

Now putting aside the analogies of the Kingdom for a moment and substituting the word Kingdom in the parables for the word Jesus we get something of what the Kingdom means in real terms. Jesus is like a Sower who sows good seed, when anyone hears the words of Jesus and understands it he yields fruit, Jesus is like a Sower who sows good seed in the world but the devil seeks to do harm by sowing seeds of destruction, Jesus is like a mustard seed that grows to accommodate and give shelter to all, Jesus is like yeast that that gives life and gives sustenance, Jesus is like the dragnet that is cast and gathers all to him and finally Jesus is a treasure, and a pearl of great price. There are very good grounds to see in these parables of the Kingdom hidden and tantalising invitations to faith in Jesus for he is the Kingdom of God in person.

So let's return to the primary description of the Kingdom in today's portion of Scripture; the Kingdom is like discovered treasure that has been hidden and the Kingdom is like a person who discovers a great pearl, that is to say Jesus is a great treasure worth giving everything up for and Jesus is like someone who needs to avail himself of everything to gain something precious. Let's begin with the Pearl.

To understand Jesus as the one who gives away everything to purchase the pearl, we need to understand this in light of what St Paul says in that wonderful hymn of Philippians Ch 2, "Jesus was in the form of God but made Himself nothing, and was obedient even to the point of death upon the cross." The pearl here is human life, it is me and it is you. God sold all that he had; he emptied himself completely so that he could purchase us. Jesus in acknowledging that every life is priceless, of immense value gave up everything even life itself to own us, to be His possession. We are pearls and our value is priceless.

It is the cross that becomes the point of purchase. It is here that we see Jesus in His human nature giving His all that he may purchase us to be united with God. His death is the moment of purchase and possession.

The cross is also central to the description of the Kingdom being a treasure that is hidden and then discovered, of Jesus being the treasure that is hidden and discovered. St Thomas Aquinas once wrote that "Deity was hidden in the cross, and speaking with a similar mind considering it was Luther, he said, "The cross was the hiding place of God's power." Looking toward the cross, we gaze upon the treasure that is God Himself. Of all the Gospels it is St John that that comes nearest to giving this sense of Jesus the man hiding in himself the treasure of God's full and total presence. The whole episode is presented to us by St John as a moment of glory. This is Christ triumphant, Christ's hour where his glory is fully displayed and uncovered for all to see.

This place of God's triumph through the cross is for many, the place where many like to remain. For it is here that the search finally ends and the treasure is discovered; it is at the cross that we find everything. It is no coincidence that Mathew gives us these powerful parables, the third major discourse of Jesus in his gospel and precedes them earlier in his gospel with the words, "Where

your treasure is there also your heart will be.” A heart that discovers this treasure of God in Jesus reconciling the world to himself will go out and sell everything to possess it. How often has that come up in Jesus’ teaching? Jesus invites the rich man to sell all he has, give to the poor and join Him as a disciple, and it is then “that he will possess treasure in heaven.” But his heart was in his possessions, if it was he who found the treasure in the field there would have been no purchase of the land and the treasure would have remained buried.

Once again it is to St Paul that we turn towards to see the Parable of the treasure and the pearl not in parable but in practice. He tells the people of Philippi, “I count everything as loss far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus, for whose sake i did in fact forfeit everything;” Which is why he could go on and say to the people of Corinth, “we proclaim Christ crucified.” This is God’s wisdom; The same Wisdom that Solomon asks for, a share in the Divine wisdom which is what ultimately pleases God.

A teacher led assembly and for his talk produced an orange. He asked the gathered school, “Could you tell me what i have here?” A boy put his hand up and said rather uninterestedly, “Its Jesus isn’t it.” The teacher said “why do you say that? The boy replied “doesn’t matter what you’ve got it always ends up being Jesus.” The parables of the Kingdom, it’s all about Jesus.

AMEN