

Sermon, Proper 12A, July 26, 2020, Jane A. Beebe

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”
(Romans 8:26-27)

What spoke to me in today’s readings was the idea of searching: specifically God’s searching for us, and our searching for God. It appears in today’s Psalm, it appears in Romans, and perhaps more obliquely, it appears in the Gospel. Jesus relates five parables in quick succession, each only a few sentences long. In each there is something small, or something unexpected, or something hidden. It is up to us to perceive how God points us towards the Kingdom in each. We are to become like the scribes who understand the value of the treasure entrusted to them: sometimes an old thing is what is required, sometimes the new.

There is humor in the parables—perhaps especially in the ones that point us to the most serious truths about how God works. Earlier this month we heard how God tends to sow seeds all over the place, in a way that doesn’t seem to make sense at first. Wheat is even allowed to grow up with the weeds. Each of the parables we hear today is like that, too. We are meant to react with, “What?!” or, “How?!” First, there is the mustard seed. Mustard was viewed as a weed. With such tiny seeds it is easy to see how such a plant could become invasive. When fully grown it is still merely a bush. However, it is able to *function* as a tree would. It can shelter birds and their nests. This is a wonderful illustration of, “All things

work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) What is seemingly too small, inadequate, or even unwanted finds its place in God’s Kingdom.

Then there is the yeast. At first glance this seems like a lovely little parable about home-baked bread. Yet, yeast in the flour can be a bad thing, actually spoiling it and making it inedible. Three measures of flour is equal to about a bushel. Deliberately mixing yeast in with so much flour is risky at best. In God’s Kingdom, however, the flour becomes leavened, ultimately yielding enough bread for an entire village. And we all know Jesus’ way with bread... In my home parish for a time, the priest, after breaking the bread, would say, “Behold what you are.” The people would respond, “May we become what we receive.” Afterwards one of my godchildren (who was probably about 7 or 8) said somewhat scathingly, “Why would we want to be bread?” I was delighted that the rector later gave a whole sermon answering her question. Essentially he said having become like the broken bread, we are able to be sent out into the world. Can we allow the leaven of the Holy Spirit to transform us and grow us into the bread we are meant to be?

Then we have the curious parable of the treasure hidden in the field. Someone finds this treasure. It is not clear if the treasure was found by chance, or if the seeker goes to a lot of work to discover it. Was there something about the field that said to the person, “Dig here?” And then the treasure is just left there, the

person having bought the field. What the treasure is, is not named. God's Kingdom is hidden, and not hidden. I believe it is only hard to find because we begin to believe it is a place far beyond us, that we may only find it with the right treasure map, when it is really right in front of us, and within us, "hidden" in the everyday.

Earlier this week I finally needed to take my car to my mechanic for an oil change. A couple of trips to the shore aside, I haven't driven my car much of anywhere. Ordinarily I would have taken my car in months ago. Times being what they are, I called the shop when I arrived, and dropped my keys through a slot in the door. Jason, my mechanic, told me I could sit out in the garden where there were chairs, and even a picnic table.

An auto repair shop with a garden? I had never really noticed it before. It was situated in the front of the property and set up with a small square tent. The molded plastic chairs were still wet with recent rain and morning dew. However, there were two comfy dark green canvas wing chairs that were dry, so I chose one of those. The garden was edged with large sunflowers in full bloom. There was even a small beehive placed in the middle with bees humming lazily about. A little after I arrived another woman came and sat at the picnic table. She remarked how lovely it was to sit in that place, and how unexpected it was to find a garden there. She had a soft Irish accent that somehow made me pay attention to her observation more than I might have.

I suppose there might be occasions when I would be moved to pray when waiting for my car to be serviced. (Please let the bill be less than \$500.00, for example). This felt like something more. What was hidden in this field? An hour given over to a routine errand was transformed into time spent in God's Kingdom, a time where I could allow the Spirit to search my heart, and where I could look for, and find God's presence. I could hear these verses from the Psalm 105:

“Glory in his holy Name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Search for the Lord and his strength;
continually seek his face.”

My worries and anxieties did not miraculously disappear; I was still firmly planted in the “real” world. Yet for a time I was reoriented, calmed; I could breathe in the peace of the morning: God's peace. In that moment I was able to briefly discern that “pearl of great price” shining out. In the parable the merchant searches for fine pearls. Was this search over a lifetime? What effort, patience, and persistence may have been required? The merchant finally finds just one he deems of great value. He sold all that he had to acquire it. This is Jesus' call to the disciples that we observe over and over: sell all that you have, and follow me. (Matthew 19:21) An echo of what Jesus says to Mary of Bethany comes to mind, “...There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42) In God's Kingdom we are not left with

nothing. As Paul tells the Romans, ““He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?””

(Romans 8:32)