

Pentecost 8, 7.26.2020

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

1 Kings 5:5-12; Psalm 119:129-36; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

“Work Together for Good”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

Good morning. Thank you for joining us online for worship at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. In today’s gospel, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, a pearl of great value, and a net. A mustard seed grows, providing sanctuary and support for others. Yeast transforms simple flour into bread that satisfies hunger. Treasure hidden in a field causes the whole field to become treasured. A pearl of great value becomes the most valued possession. The net gathers all people, good and bad, into God’s kingdom.

A seed that grows, yeast that transforms, hidden treasure, a pearl of absolute value, and a net that gathers all people. The kingdom of heaven is about *growth, transformation, hiddenness, absolute value, and God’s unconditional love for all people.*

The mustard seed grows like faith, providing refuge for us and for others in the storms of life. Transformative yeast reminds us of the Eucharist that transforms everyday bread into the means of grace, feeding all who are hungry, so that we might also feed those around us. Treasure hidden in a field describes the treasure that is Christ Jesus hidden in the suffering of the cross, so that we too might be hidden in Christ as we suffer with and for others. The pearl of great value describes the unconditional love of the gospel that becomes the most valuable thing in our lives. The net describes the universal and inclusive body of Christ that welcomes all, good and bad, because Christ’s love has the power to transform everyone.

Jesus is describing the ultimate reality and reign of God’s kingdom in our lives. Jesus uses parables and metaphor so we might glimpse the hidden but very real reality of God alive in our lives. Jesus describes the *power of God* that transforms us from sinful people into courageous people of faith. Jesus describes the *presence of God* that becomes the most treasured part of our lives, treasure hidden in the cross of Christ, allowing us to suffer with and for others. Jesus describes the *grace of God* that gathers us into the church where we realize our common humanity with all people in the unfolding present and future of God’s kingdom. With God we grow and are transformed, we treasure the cross and we are set free to live in the universal fellowship of Christ’s body, the church.

If all of this sounds too good to be true, Paul writes: “*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*” God’s purpose for us is

growth, transformation, the treasure of Christ, and the universal human family that is the body of Christ. God wants all of us to grow and be transformed into a holy body, the church. God declares that all people have value. This value is not based upon what someone has done, where they were born, the color of their skin, their gender, their wealth or social standing. All people have been created in the divine image of God, and therefore, have absolute value.

*“All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”* God’s purpose for each of us is growth, transformation, the treasure of Christ, and the universal value of all people. God’s purpose is to create a kingdom in which all people reach their full potential and are transformed to love and serve others as a holy people.

This is the goal and ideal of the kingdom of heaven, but as human beings we often fall short of the glory God has prepared for us. As human beings, we often seek the shortsighted treasures of personal wealth rather than the treasure of Christ and his cross. We often seek judgment upon our enemies rather than seeing that our future is inseparably linked with our sisters and brothers who are also created in God’s image. Our future is hidden in the treasure of Christ, his cross, his body the church, and grace that teaches us the difference between good and evil.

To recognize the kingdom of heaven in and around us requires a commitment to prayer, and a commitment to seek the wisdom that comes only from God. Today’s Old Testament reading reminds us that the things of the kingdom and true wisdom come only from God.

After the death of his father, King David, Solomon became king, and in a dream Solomon spoke with God. Solomon said, *“I am only a little child, I do not know how to go out or come in.”* In saying this, Solomon spoke with great humility. As the son of a great and mighty king, Solomon could have been arrogant. Solomon could have thought he knew how to do everything, but instead, Solomon asked God for an understanding mind to discern between good and evil, so he could govern the people with wisdom. The Bible tells us that it pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this of the Lord.

As a leader, Solomon did not seek personal power, material wealth, or the destruction of his enemies; rather, Solomon sought wisdom. Solomon sought to discern God’s will and purpose. Solomon was concerned with learning the difference between good and evil. True leadership is always concerned with matters of ultimate importance. People’s lives and livelihoods are in the balance, and Solomon sought God’s wisdom with humility forever showing us the path to true leadership.

So much of our lives is spent in the penultimate, with matters that are not of ultimate importance. But wisdom comes in knowing that we can only navigate the matters daily life if we also pay attention to those things that are of ultimate importance - the treasures of the kingdom of heaven.

So much of our trouble as human beings comes from thinking we know best, thinking we alone can solve the problems of good and evil that plague us and our history. Solomon, Paul, and Jesus all remind us that only God searches our hearts, only God gives wisdom to discern good and evil, and only the kingdom of heaven transforms us to see the treasures of Christ hidden in our fellow human beings. We need God and we need our fellow sisters and brothers, to work together for good.

Imagine what the world would be like if no one cooperated on anything. Imagine what our lives would be like if no one sought to know the difference between good and evil. Imagine what human community would be like if no one sought growth and transformation. Imagine what our world would be like if we were not concerned with ultimate things that transform our very ordinary lives. The world is always filled with disunity, good intentions and evil outcomes. We always stand in need God's transformative grace and wisdom.

Paul declares "*we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us.*" Yet our world continues to pursue the conquest and conquering of our neighbors and fellow human beings, rather than allowing God to conquer our hearts, transforming us with the wisdom to live for others. Only when we open our hearts to God's wisdom will we be truly able to work for good in the world. God's presence is the path to transformation for the world, our communities, and for ourselves.

Again, Paul declares, "*If God is for us, who can be against us!*" Where God is, there is growth and transformation. With God, though we suffer with others, evil cannot defeat us. Solomon, Paul and Jesus are all describing participation in the kingdom of heaven. That little word "kingdom" appears *six times* in today's gospel, and it is an obvious comparison to the kingdoms, rulers, leaders, and powers of this world. There is no kingdom on earth that will outlast the kingdom of heaven; we are fooling ourselves if we think there is. There is no ruler or leader whose power is absolute, and there is no power that can separate human beings from the love of God in Christ Jesus. All earthly leaders and kingdoms will be judged by the kingdom of heaven and by the wisdom of God.

As the son of a great king, Solomon knew that he needed God's help to become a great leader of people. Solomon is remembered because he sought wisdom with humility. Humility leads to compassion, "*compassio,*" which means "to suffer with" others. Humility leads to a realization of

one's own shortcomings and sinfulness that need the forgiving transformation of God's grace. Wisdom leads to a desire learn and to know. Humility and wisdom open us to the gifts of others, and to knowing God's transformative grace.

Today we remember St. Mark's 2020 high school graduates. Ally, Erin, Evan and Karsen - as you go out into the world Christ goes with you. Each day, may you seek the wisdom to know good from evil and may you discover the treasures of God's kingdom alive in you and in others. May you seek the transformative grace of God that will help you become humble and wise leaders who compassionately work for good with others in this world.

*"All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."* Seeking God pulls us into the kingdom of God. Seeking God's wisdom leads us to work together for good. More than to any earthly kingdom, leader or power, look to God for the treasures of the kingdom and the wisdom to work for good rather than for evil. Each day, work together for good, seeking the treasures of the kingdom that transform us to live for others. Work together for good! Amen.