



ST. PAUL

LUTHERAN CHURCH
ANAMOSA, IOWA

CREATIVELY CONNECT • INTENTIONALLY GROW • JOYFULLY SERVE

July 26, 2020
8th Sunday after
Pentecost

Prayer Concerns: For Pastor Beener, Lynn Rickels, Marty Rowland, Fred Williams, Denny Oltmann, Troy Lyon, and Leslie Swartz (niece of Jan Allaire); for all facing issues from the corona virus—sickness or social isolation; and for the family of June Ulferts and Betty Willimack.

Introduction: As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!

Pastor Beener: If you would like to send a card, Pastor and Bev Beener
300 Claymor Road, Unit 1C
Hinsdale, IL 60521

Wedding Photos appreciated: If you were married at St. Paul Lutheran Church from 2000–2020 we would like to have a copy of your wedding picture for the 2023 Anniversary Book (or before 2000 if you have not turned it in already). Please include your names (women's maiden name) and date you were married. Please send electronically if possible to stpaulanamosa@gmail.com or bring a photo to the office to be scanned. We appreciate your efforts.

2020 Anniversary Book Photos Needed: We are also looking for snap shots of special celebrations that happened at St. Paul. Please email or bring your photos to the office, include names and dates.

Jones County Food Bank: To donate money, make checks payable to Jones County Community Food Bank (NOT HACAP) and mailed to 105 Broadway Place, Anamosa IA 52205. For appointment to drop off/pick up call 462-4343. **They need peas, pancake syrup, canned potatoes.**

17th Annual Jones County School Supply Drive
Supplies needed: Backpacks, pencil bags and boxes, colored pencils, colored markers, expo markers, glue sticks, loose leaf paper (wide ruled), highlighters, spiral notebooks (wide ruled), crayons (24 pack), pencils and glue bottles. **Drop off sites:** Monticello Express, Citizen State Bank (Oxford Junction, Wyoming) Olin City Hall, Journal Eureka (Anamosa), Edward Jones/Shear Inspiration (Anamosa). Take advantage of the school supplies sales now to stretch your donation dollars.

LWR: We will not try to do our annual Lutheran World Relief kits and quilts projects this fall. If you would like to make a donation to the Lutheran World Relief please go to their website: lwr.org - Thank you for your generous heart.

The Pulse: Starting August 2 the bulletin and newsletter will be combined into one publication. The Pulse will be published weekly and the deadline is 9:00 a.m. on Mondays. Any late submissions will be considered but most likely published in the following week's edition.

Forks and Friends Community Meals:

Sunday Outdoor Services at Wapsi-Ana Park at 10:30 A.M. July 26-September 28. Taped services can be found on Facebook, St. Paul website and St. Paul YouTube page. An e-blast will be sent by 9:00 a.m. Sunday mornings if there is a cancelation.

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12 NIV

⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷ "Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

The two Books of Kings are among the historical books of the Jewish people. First Kings generally recounts the period in which David's son Solomon reigned over Israel, the building of the first Temple in Jerusalem, and the eventual degeneration of Solomon's faithfulness to Yahweh; approximately 900 BCE.

In the beginning of his kingship, Solomon recognized himself as the youthful servant of Yahweh, but he also lived in a time when treaties with neighboring countries were crucial for one's protection. Just prior to today's passage, Solomon had married one of the daughters of

Egypt's Pharaoh in order to protect the southern border of his kingdom. {Solomon is supposed to have married seven hundred woman (a greatly exaggerated number to show completeness) from various countries because he wanted to protect his people or as scripture reports, "he fell in love with them" (1 Kings 11:3). While this may have been part of his original intention, the situation it created also led to infighting and his eventual turn to the worship of gods other than Yahweh.} At this early point in his reign, no mention is made of idolatry, only that he worships the Lord God at the best shrine because the Temple has not yet been built. He is faithful to the covenant with his God.

Interactions with God were as mysterious to these ancient peoples as they are to people today (although we like to believe we understand God better...). Frequently, the ancients described these encounters as "dreams," and most often God revealed something important in the dream. In today's account, Solomon is visited by God in a dream and is invited to ask a favor of God as a reward for his fidelity. Solomon responds in a way we wish all leaders would respond, with humility. Despite being young, he does not ask the things we might expect an ambitious youth to request, like personal riches, a longer than normal life, or death for the enemies he fears. Instead, he asks for an understanding heart and the ability to distinguish right from wrong so he can be a just leader of God's people.

Indeed, God was pleased with Solomon's altruistic request, and as a result, today we still hear of God's gift to him: Solomon's "Hearing Heart." Those who exude wisdom have a way of bringing order out of chaos, insight out of dishonesty, and truth from manipulation. Instead of judging rashly or harshly, they patiently invite the old to inform the new, and grow through change. These are godly characteristics because they flow from the divine realm of the heart.

Psalms 119:129-136 NIV

¹²⁹ Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. ¹³⁰ The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. ¹³¹ I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

¹³² Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name.

¹³³ Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. ¹³⁴ Redeem me from human oppression, that I may obey your precepts. ¹³⁵ Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees. ¹³⁶ Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

Second Reading: Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome 8:26-39 NIV

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we

ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Are humans destined for glory or for suffering? Your answer could color your whole experience of life. St. Paul is moving from the first part of his letter to the Romans which addressed the suffering that seems to be inherent in the human condition to a teaching about the life God has planned for us beyond the suffering. According to Paul, our glory is inevitable in the plan of God; God predestined us for paradise and God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus to justify us and remind us of that truth. At the same time, our suffering is inevitable in the course of human life because even though God predestined us for fullness of life with Him, the original sin of our ancestors disordered our

relationship with God. Some Christians have been led to believe that glory in the presence of God will only be a reward after patiently enduring this life's crises, but Paul would rather have us see that this life is already a mixture of glory and suffering. In Genesis chapter 2, humans are called by God to be His stewards and vicars within creation. The intention and call of God doesn't change at any point in history, but because of sin, our ability to respond to that call has been damaged. So, according to Paul, God shared Himself with us in the form of Jesus so that through His loving sacrifice, all creation would again be ordered to God's call. Those who believe in Jesus and are conformed to His image, share in His glory. Even now we participate to some degree in the glory that will come to fullness when we meet God face to face. That is why we so strongly believe in the real presence of God/Christ when we gather for Sunday Eucharist.

The guiding principle for our Christian optimism is that all things work together for good in those who love God. A perfect example of this is that we pray for and to those who have died. We believe that the here and hereafter are somehow connected in relationship with God. And so, our efforts to do good are not motivated solely by a desire to avoid suffering (which can't be done) or to convince God that we are worthy of affection, but rather are our response to God who first called us into a relationship of love. His Son reminded us of this truth.

Gospel: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 NIV

³¹ Jesus told the crowd another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

³³ He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." ⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked

from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.

⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

We are presented with more parables about the kingdom of heaven and what it means to be disciples of Jesus in God's reign. The first two suggest that the kingdom of heaven appears and grows in the most mysterious of places and ways. The parables in vs. 44-46 suggest reasonable responses to finding the truth of God's reign, and the last (vs. 47-50) seems to deal with how one participates in that reign.

It is not completely helpful for me to try to explain the parables ahead of time because that risks driving you into a particular way of understanding what Jesus and Matthew are saying. Instead, I would invite you to listen very attentively to the images Jesus presents and ask yourself, "Who am I in these stories?" "How do they speak to my heart?" "What am I being invited to consider about God's Kingdom?"

How do the people discovering the kingdom of God react? Is it the way you expect someone to react when they are excited about something, or are their reactions over and above reasonable expectations? Perhaps Jesus is testing our sensibilities when it comes to responding to the invitation to become a disciple in God's kingdom. Can a person presented with such great treasure do anything but respond zealously? Of course, a person could choose to walk away or think there's too much risk or try to connive possession of the treasure. But in Jesus' stories, the people invest everything in order to have it. They identify the treasure but realize that it is in someone else's possession, so each must engage in additional activity before s/he can fully acquire it (perhaps this is a reference to being engaged in something like the catechumenate or a Bible study).

The final parable sounds very much like last week's parable of the wheat and the weeds. Jesus definitely presents us with a sense that our job in the kingdom is to be patient with everyone and let God's love influence things over time. The image of the net being dragged through the water is unique in that a net gathers in old boots as well as nourishing fish to sell or eat. Jesus doesn't tell them not to use the net but rather to bring the catch to the shore where someone else with a broader vision will do the sorting. One of the other cautions about the Kingdom is that if we are left to the judging, we might toss aside what/who God considers valuable in another way. An old tire to one person is a new swing or sandbox to another. God's perspective is different than ours.

The story goes on to say that those who are deemed unacceptable at the end of the age will be thrown into the fiery furnace, an image that comes from the very real presence of the garbage pits outside the city walls. These garbage areas were constantly burning with the refuse of the people, and they likened it to the place where those who were outside the reign of God were cast. The Jewish term *Gehenna*, often times mistranslated as hell, comes from the garbage pit in the Valley of Hinnom, on the south side of Jerusalem. It was also the site where the people who inhabited Jerusalem prior to the Jews offered human sacrifices to their gods. Perhaps we can hear this as a metaphor for the disappointment and hardship people will experience when they realize they have chosen to remain outside God's Kingdom.

Now, reread these similes presented by Matthew and replace the "Kingdom of God" with "the Christian community." The members of Matthew's community had been faced with the decision to "sell all they had," in order to adhere themselves to this new Christian community outside Jerusalem. Those who were in the community could answer "yes" about understanding the nature of this kingdom in the absence of the Temple and Jerusalem (which were destroyed in 70 AD).

There is some speculation that the educated scribe being described in the last verses is a self-reference by Matthew concerning the work to which he and the "understanding disciples" had been called. Like Jesus, they were responsible to present the new situation in which the Christian community found themselves as a development of the old ways God had been revealed to the Jews. In these stories, the scribe is saying that the Kingdom of God is likely not what or where you thought it would be. Think bigger and broader and more populated! The old and the new could have been a reference to who was popularly considered in the Kingdom of the Righteous and who was outside. According to the Jewish leaders of the reformed Judaism now driven out of Israel, the followers of Jesus were out. But, there were "Pharisee followers" and Gentiles converting to be part of the Christian community. What would a good master of the household do to bring a family together?

Taking it home:

Discuss: what ideas connect the first reading and gospel today? Is there a theme that connects all three readings this weekend?

Describe your response to the treasure presented to you today: the Kingdom of God.... "I am willing to give everything to participate in it." "I am lukewarm about being in the kingdom of God." "It's not really important to me right now." "I'll think about it more when things get tough." "God wouldn't really keep me from the kingdom!" "Don't ask me to give up everything

for anything!" "If it's such a great thing, why aren't more people buying it?"

Read these parables again this week. Note how different words and ideas seem to emerge each time. What insights do you gain as you spend time with them? This is the source of wisdom.

Imagine yourself a learned scribe: what new aspects of the catholic church are a part of your faith life, and what old aspects do you hold on to? Jesus calls us to bring out the old and the new in our "whole making."

Name one thing you have to give up in order to make your relationship with God more of a priority.

Name the wise people in your life. What makes them wise? Figure out how to spend more time around them. "You get to be like those you hang by."

Mindfulness (set aside five minutes. breathe and read through three times. Which words or ideas hold energy for you? What images and feelings emerge in your imagination?)

"Without elders, much of our history has been formed by juniors reacting, overreacting, and protecting their own temporary privilege, with no deep-time vision like the Iroquois Nation, which considered, "What would be good for the next seven generations?" Compare that to the present "Tea Party" movement in America." — *Richard Rohr, Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

"We depend on this planet to eat, drink, breathe, and live. Figuring out how to keep our life support system running needs to be our number-one priority. Nothing is more important than finding a way to live together - justly, respectfully, sustainably, joyfully - on the only planet we can call home." — *Annie Leonard, The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and our Health—and a Vision for Change*

"That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That lands yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten." — *Aldo Leopold*

St. Paul Office Hours

Lois: M-Th 9-2; F 9-12

Kaileen: M-F 6:00-9:30 pm (summer hours)

Call for an appointment for Pastor Rodney, Nancy, or Brie.

Hours Open

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Please call us if we can be of assistance. PLEASE leave a message if we cannot answer. We will return your call ASAP. We may be separated, BUT we are not alone!