

**Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (A)**  
**1 Kings 3:5-12 Romans 8:26-39 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**  
**St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH**  
**July 26, 2020**

In the middle of all the turmoil in our country right now, where it feels like politics has invaded practically every aspect of our lives and everyone is yelling as loud as they can and scrambling to get on top of the heap...it's perfect how in the middle of all this, you and I come to church today and get these miniature parables from Jesus, each one not much more than a single sentence long. They're like little seeds of God's kingdom that Jesus is quietly planting in our souls. They're tiny, but they have power to grow in us and change the way we see everything in our lives and in the world. The first parable is about the mustard seed, the tiniest little seed, that grows into a hardy, tough shrub so big that birds can actually perch in its branches and find rest and shelter.

Then he talks about yeast that the woman mixes in with the flour to make bread: a tiny bit of unseen yeast sprinkled in with the dough makes the whole loaf expand. Then he talks about the treasure hidden in the field—it's invisible to most, but it's there. The person who finds that treasure sells everything else he has to buy that field. Likewise with the pearl of great price—another small, easily missed object. When the man finds the pearl, he sells everything else he's got just to have it.

In all these parables, Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God as something small, that the world can easily overlook. If it's like a mustard seed, a bit of yeast, a hidden treasure, or a tiny pearl, we can miss it...especially if we're in a hurry, certainly if we're fighting other people, if we're angry and frustrated and feeling defenseless and vulnerable and afraid. That's what the worldly spiritual powers are doing to us right now, they're pushing us to become angry, hate-filled, resentful, threatened people. The devil loves it when people jump into their defensive bunkers and wave banners and shout slogans.

But God found us in that bunker of death. And now we have the pearl of great price—Jesus Christ. We have the Word of God that grows up in our lives like a mustard bush which is very hard to uproot. And we can find shelter and rest in its branches, like the birds Jesus talks about.

During the quarantine, and now with all the social turmoil, the importance of the Sabbath, the day of rest that God gives us, has really hit home. The Sabbath is the day we set aside to hear the Word of God with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and as you and I worship and praise God and give him thanks, things come into perspective. We remember that with all our troubles, we are not the center of the universe. The Sabbath is kind of like a beautiful walk in a park, where we are reminded by the trees and the bubbling stream and the clouds floating in the sky over our heads that no matter how loud people yell at each other, there's something much bigger than us. The trees will keep growing, the creek will keep flowing over the rocks, and the clouds will keep drifting across the sky. From the Word of God, we know who made the trees and the creek and the sky; he's the One who pours out his grace on everyone, the just and the unjust alike. He's the one who loved this broken world so much that he was broken for it. The real ruler of this universe—the true King of it all—was crucified on a cross for the sake of everyone, rich and poor, black and white, people of every language and nation. And he knows your name and my name. He died for you and me. We can trust him and receive his grace and give thanks and be grateful for everything, even for our struggles and failures.

He gives you and me the Sabbath, this time to step back from it all and see the treasure hidden in the field. To step back from the politics, the fighting, the worries, the fear of sickness and death, and to remember that God is going to bring resurrection and new life out of all this. In today's gospel we also hear the parable of the net that's cast into the water, which brings up all the different kinds of fish. Jesus makes it clear: we are not the ones who sort the fish into good and bad piles. God will take care of the final judgment. Holding on to nothing but Jesus, the pearl of great price, we can focus on the few things in life

over which we have any real control, and let go of the rest. We can take care of details from day to day, but since we have Jesus, we can let go of our lives. Praise God, what a load off! At the same time, as I put my trust in him, I also understand, all the more, that I need to hear God's Word and engage with it, and study it, and observe the Sabbath, and make time for it, otherwise all the frustrations and cares of this world will wrap themselves around me and make me miss the gift of the Kingdom that God wants me to experience in a very personal, joyful, close way.

Now you might be thinking, Pastor Seth is an escapist. He's using religion to escape from the realities of the world while the country goes to pot. He thinks he can stand above it all as a Christian and not get involved. He thinks he can live in a beautiful imaginary park while the world burns. That's not the case. There are six other days in the week when we're called to work and publicly be God's people in the world for the sake of the world as it is, in all of its ugliness and brokenness and pain and sin. I'm just emphasizing the Sabbath these days because I think it's often the first thing we're in danger of missing. The world right now is trying to close up that special space we have with God, lure us away from the Word that gives us perspective. It's trying to keep us from remembering what God has done for us and who he has made us. As we hear in 1 Peter: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

So the other six days of the week are where we get down to business and proclaim who is Lord to the world by what we say with our mouths and do with our bodies, and that is going to lead us into the world of politics. Christians will get their hands dirty, six days of the week. And that's why we have to remember, all the time, who we are answering to. It certainly should have an effect on how we speak to our neighbors, show a basic respect towards them, how we follow the Golden Rule. One thing is sure: When we proclaim Jesus is Lord, we are also proclaiming that no one else is, and that's always gotten us in trouble. The Christian martyrs who died for the faith did not go looking for fights, but when they were told to worship something other than Christ, whether it was a government, or a cause, or a utopian dream that promised to bring heaven to earth by human efforts, they did not let go of their treasure. They gave their lives to hold onto the pearl of great price. And in doing that, they showed their freedom from any worldly authority.

We're seeing right now what happens when more and more people ignore God and try to push him out of the picture. They feel alone and disconnected, so they yell louder while they're blown around like leaves on the winds of the world. This is what happens when human beings think they're the center of the universe. You and I know that it's only in the crucified Savior Jesus Christ, who stands at the center of it, that human beings will have any future together. Without the crucified Savior at the center, it's all ultimately different teams fighting each other to the death, just like the different factions who were there at the crucifixion of Jesus. No one wins in that situation...except God. Praise be to Jesus Christ, who was raised up from death to bring forgiveness and new life for everyone out of that death and brokenness.

And now the Holy Spirit is generously casting out the seeds of the Kingdom into the world, and he wants you and me to join him in sowing those seeds. The seeds of that new life are going to sprout up in the end, and everyone will see the One who died and rose for them. Let's be like those birds Jesus talks about in the parable of the mustard seed. Now that we've found joy and endless forgiveness and peace in the shelter of his branches, let's sing his praises to the world.