

Sermon for Sunday, July 26, 2020 - 8th Sunday after Pentecost

based on 1 Kings 3:5-12; Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Preached

At Zion Lutheran Church, Lebanon - Pastor Bruce G. Osterhout

What a temptation it is for preachers everywhere this morning, for all who use the Revised Common Lectionary, to talk about how King Solomon turned to God in prayer asking for guidance on how to govern with wisdom, the people of Israel.

Our Lutheran tradition dictates that we preachers approach the scriptures differently than the way that other, more free Christian groups do. The scripture texts assigned for the day speak to me, the preacher, and to all of us, as the gathered faith community. I as the preacher **I DO NOT get to choose what I want to preach** on and thus choose the scripture passages to back up my message. It is up to the preacher to digest the scriptural texts for the day and relate them to life as it is currently being lived. In the olden days, more than 34 years now, when I went to seminary in South Carolina, we were taught to have the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other hand when we preach.

Nowadays, here in the 21st century, with only 8% of the population now reading a printed newspaper anymore, I would have to substitute the word “MEDIA” for newspaper, wouldn’t I? And what a crazy amount of news is out there for us all to digest or choose not to digest, each day. What is reliable and can be trusted? What is made up, fake, or just some robotic Russian MEME generated to disrupt and spread rumor and innuendo, something designed to influence my thinking and our thinking.

This morning, I could tread on some very confusing topics, couldn’t I, I could keep us all here for a long time, If I choose to, if I went down the path of talking about King Solomon’s quest for wisdom. Or anyone who is put in charge, for that matter. Suffice it to say, does anyone here think that government and politics and all of the sinful human beings involved, at the city, county, state, nation and global levels is managing life well these days?

We can only hope. We can only pray. We can only trust that our elected leaders can stay the course of the democratic principles that have guided our country from its’ very beginning.

In places, like Portland-Oregon / Chicago, Illinois and at the Walmart in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania or even the county of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, just to name a few places, **human beings are struggling to find justice and mercy and live together in peace and harmony.** Enough about our first reading then. Well, almost.

Martin Luther, in his thinking, was ahead of his time. 500 years ago, Martin Luther advanced the idea of the 2 kingdoms. God who rules all and is above all. And nations and governments which are to rule and serve the common good of the people. Democratic ideals and city states were being born during the 16th century and Martin Luther advanced the thinking about how governing is done. Go ahead a google it if you would like to think more about Luther’s ideas.

You see, there is the kingdom of God-the kingdom of heaven is the same thing for Matthew, which all of the baptized are called to build here on earth. And there are these temporal, fallible, earthly kingdoms that are to work to govern in ways that practice justice and equity and care for all the people. These 2 kingdoms have always come into conflict with each other, butting heads, if you will. Maybe at no other time in history then right now as the power and use of media threatens to undermine so much of what we hold dear.

Jesus, in today's Gospel reading uses some very simple, everyday items to teach his disciples about the characteristics of God's kingdom here on earth. 5 to be more exact. Did you catch them all? # 1. There is **a tiny little seed** becomes a great sheltering tree. # 2. **Some yeast** penetrates and expands the grain into a loaf of bread as it bakes. # 3 **A treasure** is found and a field is purchased. # 4 A jeweler finds **a rare pearl** of great value, and mortgages everything to buy it. And # 5 **A strong fishing net** that catches and holds all kinds of fish until they can be sorted up on the shore at the end of the age. How Jesus talks about these 5 items, helped the disciples and helps we, as believers today, to think about the kind of world, the kind of kingdom, that God desires here on earth. If you are trained for the kingdom of God, you must be able to bring out what is new and what is old, you must be able to mentally process, that is THINK about and CARRY out, Jesus' and thus God's mission to save the whole world.

You see, it might be like this, my friends: # 1 As believers, we are to think small knowing that God will grow it big. Like the mustard seed. # 2 As his followers, we need to remember that God works from the inside of people, in their hearts and minds, to affect change in the whole loaf of community. # 3 If you find something valuable, stick with it. Treasure it. Hold on to it. But be sure to use it to God's glory. # 4 To be faithful is to risk it all, knowing where your treasure is, is where God wants you to put it. We must make changes to advance our pursuit of God's kingdom here on earth. And finally # 5, we must trust that the net of God's love is very strong, that God wants to catch all of the fish, not just some of the fish. How does that favorite old song go? Red and yellow black and white they are precious in God's sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world. Yes, even those little ones who are being held separately from their parents.

Doing all of these things, and more, will build up God's kingdom here on earth.

If you need anymore inspiration for your faith this morning, I commend to you the 8th chapter of Romans, one of the most profound and influential chapters in all of scripture. Paul the missionary writes about how we are "more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, who loves all of us.

Blessings to each of you this day. May the love of God fill you with peace today and always. Amen.

