

WORSHIP: EIGHTH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST, YEAR A, UPMP

PRELUDE: "Canon in D"

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP: "Christ Be our Light" (Handout)

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

HYMN AFTER SCRIPTURE: "To God Be the Glory" (#40)

SERMON "Have You Understood All This?"

"Have you understood all this?" Jesus asks.

Read those words last Monday, sitting in a waiting room at a tire shop in Salmon, Idaho

--incidentally, if you ever need a tire patched out west, find the local Les Schwab tire shop—it's a chain. They patch it for free. They said "no charge, just think of us when you need new tires" I thought I was special for a moment, but when I told others that I met on the trip about this, they said "Yep, that's what Les Schwab does."

Now *there's* some wisdom for you, huh? "Where to get a tire patched for free when you are out west." I can also detail good and bad restaurants along the way, good and bad hotels, I can tell you where to stop along the rivers if you like sandbars or swimming holes, or neat places to camp, or hot springs or hidden waterfalls—any of this significant?

Maybe not now, but I'm pretty sure that if you were heading out to Idaho, you might pull me aside and ask for a little of my wisdom from lived experience.

Or wait a minute? Is that wisdom? Or just information? I did begin that last part with the word "incidentally" after all.

What if I said: I know a company whose policy is to be kind and generous and it will come back to you in the long run. And it is working for them.

What if I said: I know a place where you can sit comfortably and take in the beauty all around you and be brought to awe with God's grandeur that you can't help but say a prayer.

What if I said "here's where you can get healthy food at a fair price for your journey"

Or "here is a place you can rest comfortably so you're renewed and refreshed"

Folks, I didn't travel this week to go on a tourist adventure, I traveled to rekindle some hope and passion and energy that seemed to be missing in my life. I traveled as a cooling off period so my actions and reactions were not impulsive and flippant, rather thoughtful and caring. I traveled to nurture a broken heart. I took a step away so that I could return to better do what God has called me to do in this life.

So all that information about hotels and restaurants and tire shops?—what about this: "If you want to get away from your everyday surroundings and immerse yourself in nature and be renewed in soul and spirit, ready to come back and respond to God's call, I can help you."

Now we're getting to what the parables are... transferring the information of common everyday life into wisdom for the daily life with God.

Parables are for everyday life, because Christian faith is for everyday life. You're probably sick of hearing me say it, but you are as much a Christian at your home on...a Thursday evening, as you are on a Sunday morning. Because God is as much with you on a weekday evening as a Sunday morning.

Difference? You're just paying more attention on Sunday.
(You are paying more attention, aren't you?)

Mustard would have been understood at the time. Maybe not the same significance to us now.

Leavened and unleavened bread would have been understood at the time. Not really a common reference in our day and age.

But friends, every time I look at that tire, I want to remember that if I practice kindness and generosity, it has a way of coming back to me. To use but one example.

Here's another way: I sat and talked to the owner of a restaurant in Idaho—and I want you to picture: long beard, tight T-shirt tucked into his khaki shorts, with a “Trump/Pence” logo on it, handgun in holster on his right hip.

We talked about the current potato shortage in Idaho. We talked about how he bought the restaurant from his in-laws and they're trying hard to make it work even though it's hard right now and he has to work all the time and misses his children growing up so fast. We talked about his time as a police officer, and when he saw my toes and I explained that two four year olds in Columbus, Montana painted them for me earlier that week, he told me that when he was in the hospital after a car crash while on the police force, it happened to be the time his young daughter just painted his nails.

Now: I have my political opinions. I have my moral convictions. But just like that tire of mine prompts thoughts of generosity, I hope when I see a Trump T-shirt, or see a man with a handgun on his hip, I want to think of this guy missing his kids because he is working so hard to keep his business afloat. I want to picture him waking up in a hospital bed and his comrades on the police force happy that he is ok but teasing him for his painted toenails.

I want to remember the human being. The real person.

I wrote in my Friday commentary, as I was ending my journey: *I met a gun-toting conservative (holster showing outside his tucked-in T-shirt) that spoke of our president as “the savior of our nation.” I met a joint-smoking river paddler (with sandals like mine on his feet) that said: “I figure the world is all [messed] up so we might as well get high and run the rapids.” I met a RV-driving retiree that said “surprised they let you into Montana with that Prius of yours” and a Harley-riding biker that asked “How do you like that car? I’ve been thinking of getting one.”*

...Such different people, but one clear thing they all have in common: they all have stories. They all have truth. They all have fears and hopes and loves and reasons for behaving and thinking they way they do.

The kingdom of heaven is present in everything around you. The kingdom of heaven is present in everyONE around you. God doesn't take breaks. God doesn't need "time outs"

We do. I sure do. And I come back remembering that kindness and generosity are God's will, and I will reap the rewards for saying YES to that life. I come back remembering that even the most small and humble action can glorify God in hundredfold ways that I may never be truly aware of. I come back remembering that my treasures are not big things like wealth and power, rather humble and precious things, through which I can witness the amazing love of God. I come back remembering that listening, more than judging, is the path to understanding and love. I come back remembering that human beings have reasons for being who they are and behaving how they do.

I come back, friends, with an appreciation that my Christian faith is everywhere around me, and the love of God is in every person.

Now, isn't that what I went out there to do in the first place? Earlier I said "I traveled to rekindle some hope and passion and energy that seemed to be missing in my life. I traveled as a cooling off period so my actions and reactions were not impulsive and flippant, rather thoughtful and caring. I traveled to nurture a broken heart. I took a step away so that I could return to better do what God has called me to do in this life."

HYMN AFTER SERMON: "In the Stars His Handiwork I See" (#276)

JOYS AND CONCERNS:

PASTORAL PRAYER

LORD'S PRAYER

SOLO: "It Was His Love"

CLOSING HYMN: "I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord" (#51)

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE