

'The kingdom of heaven is like' . . .

St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Bridgeville, Delaware
"The Little Church with a Big Heart"

A Prayer for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2020

COLLECT

O GOD, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

FIRST READING – 1 Kings 3:5-12

AT GIBEON THE LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

PSALM 119:129-136

(REFRAIN – *When your word goes forth it gives light.*)

129 Your decrees are wonderful; *
therefore I obey them with all my heart.
130 When your word goes forth it gives light; *
it gives understanding to the simple.
131 I open my mouth and pant; *
I long for your commandments.
132 Turn to me in mercy, *
as you always do to those who love your
Name.

133 Steady my footsteps in your word; *
let no iniquity have dominion over me.
134 Rescue me from those who oppress me, *
and I will keep your commandments.
135 Let your countenance shine upon your servant *
and teach me your statutes.
136 My eyes shed streams of tears, *
because people do not keep your law.

SECOND READING – Romans 8:26-39

THE SPIRIT HELPS us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

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

THE GOSPEL – Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

ANOTHER PARABLE: Jesus put before the crowds 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.”

SERMON – Fr. Carl Mosley

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I sat down to put this sermon together I began to reflect on the Gospel and where I am in this life. My bride and I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to live a full life and have been able to live in the Ocean City area now for over twenty years. We have been sitting out on our balcony with one of our daughters and her fiancé enjoying another cup of coffee and watching the crazies on Coastal Highway and also enjoying our view of the ocean and bay with the 80 degree temperatures. It is just heavenly. Wait a minute, isn't that our Gospel reading for the day?

We all have different perspectives of what heaven looks and feels like. Our image of heaven, in many cases, tends to be some form of paradise where everything is beautiful and wonderful. Is it that city with streets paved in gold or with soft white clouds and angels singing and playing their harps?

We tend, in our culture, many times to link heaven with the success that comes with wealth or power. We can acquire more, receive more, perhaps hit the lottery and in that we equate that it is "pure heavenly." If we gather with friends and family and remember Mom's apple pie or that time we went on vacation and were on the beach in Hawaii. It may be the trip we took to the mountains and hiked some trails enjoying nature or just sitting in our own back yard that we sit back and exclaim, "I've died and gone to heaven. Is heaven the Garden of Eden before sin came into the world? Wow, so many images that we conjure up in our own minds.

In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians it is said "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Jesus, however, preached that heaven is in the midst of us. Heaven is not something that we have to wait for or get on an airplane and travel to, but something we can experience both now and in the future. The parables that Jesus told in the reading today are about seeing and doing things differently. The man who found the precious pearl was so excited that he sold all he had to retain it. The man who found the treasure in the field went and sold all he had just to buy the field. Heaven is all around us. We just have to look.

Matthew's reading today gives us five parables and sometimes looks like a lot to cram into the reading. From the treasure in the field to the pearl of great value, all are calling us to look around to see that heaven is with us each and every day. All we have to do is look outside the box and to see and try and comprehend what is around us.

I particularly like the parable of the pearl of great value. It could be because I was born in the month of June and that has been my birthstone for all these many years. A pearl is the only gem that can't be improved by man. Oh you can cut and polish a diamond, ruby or other stones, but if you begin to try and alter a pearl's appearance, shape or size, you ruin it. It's perfect when it is formed.

As we look at the parable, we see that the man who is searching for the pearl is Jesus, Himself. He searches for those who would follow Him yet lead others to the treasures that lay ahead. What other great treasure does God value in this world beyond you and me? Sometimes we have to look to discover what the pearl means in our lives.

Why did our Lord choose the symbol of the pearl for the church? Why didn't he use the ruby or diamond? The answer could be that the pearl is the only jewel which is a product of living matter. A pearl is a response of an oyster to something which causes it injury. A pearl grows with the oyster out of the hurt of some outside force. We all know how a pearl is formed. That irritant that lodges in the shell of an oyster is something that the oyster cannot remove. It has no hands to wipe it out. No means of defense other than to transform that thing that is causing it injury or hurt. It begins to form a cocoon around it to protect it and in so doing forms something wonderful and precious as we are in God's sight.

Healing the human hurt is God's business. When we are hurting, God will begin to transform that hurt into something that can be overcome by the surrounding presence of our Lord and Savior. The cross is God's answer to the hurt humanity has caused.

I would like to think that God is transforming me each and every day into a pearl. For the hurt that has been done to me or the hurt that I inflict on others, He is working to heal me, to heal others by his protection and loving grace. Heaven is all around us. Open your eyes and behold the beauty that is God's creation.

God bless,

Fr. Carl+