

Sunday, July 26, 2020 – 8th Sunday After Pentecost

Add to your prayer list: Andrew Gunder (Kim Ala's son in law) is now home from deployment and doing very well! The family would like to thank all who have kept our troops in their prayers.

Daniel Rigdon (Kim Ala's nephew) who is in the Army, deployed at the end of June to Afghanistan. Right now, they are stating he will be there for a year. Please keep him in your prayers!

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!

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Prayer of the Day

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12

Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well.

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

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. (Ps. 119:130)

Your decrees are wonderful; therefore I obey them with all my heart.

When your word is opened it gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

I open my | mouth and pant because I long for your commandments.

Turn to me and be gracious to me, as you always do to those who love your name.

Order my footsteps in your word; let no iniquity have dominion over me.

Rescue me from those who oppress me, and I will keep your commandments.

Let your face shine upon your servant and teach me your statutes.
My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your teaching.

Second Reading: Romans 8:26-39

These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.

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.

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

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that “the kingdom of heaven is near!” Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

[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.”

Devotion

The actor Ted Danson played a doctor on the tv show called Becker. In one episode he found out that two of his friends were seriously dating the same guy who was also married. Here is the thing, Dr. Becker just hated getting involved with other people's lives which is what made the tv show a comedy.

The problem for Dr. Becker is a common problem. Once we know something, it is hard, if not impossible to deny what we know. It's like seeing something that you wish you hadn't seen. You can't unsee it. In the mean time you will give in to it or fight it with every ounce of energy you have.

This is what I call the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Like the smallest of seeds, the idea of the kingdom of heaven has been planted in us. It may lay dormant for years, but when it grows, it will either over grow our old beliefs or our old beliefs will be the foundation upon which it grows.

It is like finding a hidden treasure. We may not know what to do with it first but we can't let it go, so we contemplate it until we know how to use it. I think that is how the word of God works. When we hear it, it becomes a part of who we are whether we like it or not, or whether it grows or not. Let me put it this way.

The first time two of our grandchildren stayed with us for a few days without their parents I was amazed. They were a total delight except for when they were scared in the middle of the night because they were in a strange house and wanted to sleep in our room. Other than that, they were pure joy. We didn't even have any discipline problems!! I also know that changes once they get home, but for us they were very good. This led to the question, "What did their parents filled them with?" Or, was this just an accident of goodness? They had to have been filled with something and it was good.

The things that God wants to fill us with are God's word, love, and commandments. Through them we learn of God's grace. When we hear the story of Jesus from birth to death to the resurrection the story becomes a part of who we are. Like finding something out or seeing something, it becomes a part of us. When we hear about the kingdom heaven, we may not believe in it at first, but it hangs around in our minds small and hidden, but there.

It's like love given to a child. They may not know what it is at first but they want more of it. Like sugar or chocolate once we taste it, it is hard to ignore.

In the Romans text, Paul talks about being predestined, to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Does this mean that we have no choice in this world? Are some of us predestine for heaven, while others are predestined to hell? I don't think so. Was it Dr. Becker's destiny to tell his two friends that they were both dating the same man? Whether he wanted to tell them or not, it was his destiny.

What do you think is the destiny of two little children who know love and discipline? Oh, there will be rocky roads, weeds and throngs along the way, but it is hard to forget the taste of love, forgiveness and grace even more than sugar and chocolate. It is hard to ignore being loved.

There is an old joke about three pastors discussing how to get bats out of the church belfry. Two of them shared what they did without success. Finally, the third pastor shared what he did. Having learned from experience he baptized those bats and then confirmed them and they left. This does happen with children too, but they don't leave with nothing.

What will be their destiny? Is it already determined? No one knows, but they have heard that they are children of God, loved by God and forgiven by God. They may fight that knowledge all their life, but they have heard it and they know that the kingdom of heaven is near. It is just one repentance away. On the day of repentance, the seed planted a long time ago begins to grow. This growth will make them dig deep into their past to bring out something old to help them deal with something new.

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Merciful God, your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter us in daily life. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of your creation. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace. We pray for our president and all our elected leaders to work with all nations to help overcome the difficulties created by the coronavirus. Guide scientist and researchers to find the vaccine for this virus with diligence and carefulness using the skills that you have given them. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this congregation ask boldly for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being your people in this place and time. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In you our lives are never lost. Strengthen us by the inspiring witness of your people in all times and places. Embolden our witness now and one day gather us with all your saints in light (especially). Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. Water and word, wine and bread: these are signs of your abundant grace. Nourish us through these gifts, that we might proclaim your steadfast love in our communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you. Thanks be to God.