

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020**  
**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Collect**

Generous God,  
you give us gifts and make them grow:  
though our faith is small as mustard seed,  
make it grow to your glory  
and the flourishing of your kingdom;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**Romans 8:26-end**

Likewise 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.

**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.'

## Sermon

There are times when I wish that it was easier to find the right path in life. To make good decisions – and know that they are good. To be certain that I have the right motivations and am heading in the right direction. I have some sympathy with the lawyer who asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” I probably wouldn’t phrase it quite that way. Probably more like, “Show me how to always do the right thing.” And of course, instead of getting the clear instructions that I so long for, the guarantee that if I follow those instructions I will be able to know that I have succeeded, Jesus would no doubt tell me a story, just as he did in answer to the lawyer’s question.

It’s not that Jesus was opposed to clarity, or indeed to helping people to find the right path. It’s that he understood the complexity of the world. He realised that simply setting rules could not account for every eventuality. It’s a bit like what we are involved in with educating children. Often the jobs that our children will end up doing are not in existence when they are at school. Yet we give them the skills to be lifelong learners so that they will be able to adapt to the changing circumstances that life inevitably brings. Not to mention a moral compass, to help them to find the right direction.

This morning’s gospel reading in many ways helps us with that moral compass. You will recall that over the last two weeks, we have heard those wonderful agricultural parables of the sower and the wheat and tares, both of which Jesus explained carefully to his disciples.

This morning we hear a series of Kingdom parables. Jesus is trying to give his listeners an understanding of Kingdom values. And for those of us who seek guidance in our lives to discern the right path, these are a good place to start. As followers of Jesus, we are called to seek God’s kingdom, to find evidence of where the kingdom is breaking through here on earth. So it helps us to explore what these parables tell us about what we are looking for.

### **1. Think small before you think big**

The first parable, that of the mustard seed, is a reminder that size doesn’t matter. Jesus is fond of mustard seeds, which are tiny seeds, and yet result in large bushes. This metaphor reminds us that small things are important to God. And indeed that small things do not necessarily stay small.

Just think about your own daily experience. How often is it that the thing that makes a difference to your day is a word of kindness; somebody taking the time to telephone; a card received through the post unexpectedly. Sometimes those things that we could brush off as insignificant really do have a disproportionate impact.

It can feel so disheartening sometimes, when we recognise the needs of the world, to feel that our own contribution to meeting those needs would be a drop in the ocean. But think of appeals like Children in Need. Or indeed the way any charitable organisation works. Each individual offering may seem relatively modest in relation to the whole. And yet when put together, they make an enormous difference. If each person in the UK donated just £1 to a cause, we would have about £66 million.

### **2. The transforming power of God**

And of course that connects with our second guiding principle. This is the parable of the yeast, which transforms modest ingredients of flour and water into bread. St. Paul helps us a bit with this, in those extraordinary words, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” This is not a promise that those who follow Jesus will be shielded from tragedy or challenges. Rather it is a recognition that there is a transforming power in God’s love. It can be helpful to see alternative translations, such as “God makes all things work together for good”, or “in all things God works for good.” It’s not that bad things don’t happen, but rather that God’s love continues to be present throughout, and that can transform.

### **3. Find what really matters**

The parables of the treasure in the field and the fine pearl are really about what we value, what we put first, what we would be prepared to give up everything else for. While I don’t expect that many of us have found lockdown and the presence of Coronavirus easy, for some of us these last months have perhaps given us a different sense of perspective. Being deprived of the company of others might have reminded us of its value. With significant limitations on our activities, we may have been able to identify more easily the most important things. While for many of us it has been painful not being able to attend church, we have been reminded that God is present everywhere and indeed any time, not just in church on a Sunday morning.

I wonder, too, whether a sense of deprivation – having our freedoms curtailed, albeit for good reason – has made us more thankful. It can be so easy to take our good fortune for granted that we can risk losing our capacity for gratitude.

### **4. Welcome everyone**

The final parable reminds us that another of our guiding principles should be an inclusive welcome. The Kingdom of God is open to everyone. Those we like and those we do not. Those we consider worthy, and those we do not. Those who are like us, and those who are not. Kingdom values include radical equality and inclusivity.

And if the parables remind us of our guiding principles as we seek to find the right path in life, it is the letter to the Romans that reminds us of how we can keep our focus on those principles. Listen to those opening words in today’s reading: “Likewise 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.” Prayer must always be our starting point. Because even if we think we don’t know how to pray or what to pray, it is in the very act of prayer that we let God’s Spirit in. And once we do that, we are not on our own, but constantly accompanied by God – the God from whose love nothing can separate us - in our decision-making.

Amen