Pentecost 8 – Proper 12 – Year A 2017

Some Sundays it seems hard to find something in the Scripture readings that one can build a homily around. Today, there is enough to fill several homilies. So when I finish with my reflections, feel free to share what has come to you about any portion of our Scriptures for today.

For the last few weeks we’ve been hearing Matthew’s collection of the parables of Jesus dealing with the kingdom of God. The sower and the seed, the weeds among the wheat. Parables are meant to lead us, by metaphor, into an understanding of a bigger truth. The bigger truth that Jesus is always talking about is the nature of God, or the nature of the kingdom – the rule – of God.

Last week when we had the story of the weeds and wheat growing together, I talked about the application of that as representative of each of our own lives. Each of us is a mixture of both weeds and wheat, and in the end, a merciful and loving God will keep what is worth keeping and blow the rest away.

We have an almost identical “message” in the last parable of today’s gospel. The net is thrown into the sea, and it picks up all sorts of things. And in the end, it will be sorted out and the good stuff will be kept, and the useless thrown away. Both of these parables are often interpreted as “last judgments” scenes. The good people will be swept into heaven and the bad will go to hell. You already know where I fall out on the hell question!

What came to me about these parables now, though, is tied to that whole “judgment” question. Basically, the message that came to me is that it’s not up to us to judge. The net is thrown into the sea and brings up good things and bad. The seed is sown in the field and both weeds and wheat grow up together. We live in a world that is a mixed bag of good and not so good, people like us and people so different from ourselves that we have no idea of how to connect with them even if we wanted to. We are in the midst of economic and political turmoil, where hatred seems to be being fed and kindness may seem rare. And it becomes easy for us to think we know who are the weeds and who the wheat. We categorize folks into the “good stuff” brought up in the net, and the trash to be thrown away. But the Gospel invites us to a different perspective. It is not ours to judge.

This most likely jumped out at me from today’s Gospel because I’ve been listening to a book on the desert mothers. And one of their prime tenets is that the sisters of the desert were not to judge anyone – not one another, not those outside the desert, not anyone. Ours is not to judge. Ours is only to love.

In the first reading, when Solomon asks for “an understanding mind”, instead of riches or fame or power, God grants him “a wise and discerning mind.” Other translations call it “Wisdom” – and the story we all know about the wisdom of Solomon is when he is called on to judge which of two women should have the baby they are each claiming. The measure Solomon uses is love: When he says, “Cut the baby in two so each can have half the child,” love reveals itself. Love will be the judge, only Love. And that is all God’s realm, God’s domain, God’s kingdom – the same kingdom Jesus keeps trying to explain to us.

The kingdom parables are not about the afterlife, or heaven and hell. Jesus is telling us, in these parables, how we are to live if we want to be living in the Presence of God here and now. This is what it looks like, he says. You are only one insignificant person, one mustard seed, who can be a place of hospitality for others, more than you know. We can be those irritating pieces of grit and sand in the political oysters of oppression that turn into a pearl, showing others that working for justice is possible and worth one’s life. The kingdom of heaven, God’s presence, is indeed a treasure that we can find right in the field we’re already plowing… God’s presence, God’s kingdom is here and now – right in the midst of systems of domination and oppression, just as it was in the time of Jesus, the leaven in the midst of the dough. And if we choose to live in the kingdom of God, in the Presence of God, then we will be leaven for enough bread for everyone.

Living in the kingdom of God is fairly hidden work. The pearl is hidden in the oyster; the treasure is buried in a field; the leaven is mixed in with the flour. We are not *all* called to be irritants in the oyster; we are not all leaven, perhaps. There are different gifts, but the same Spirit, Paul tells us, the same Presence of God expressing itself in each and all of us – to bring the kingdom of God to life in the here and now. And it is not ours to judge who is in and who is out.

There are practical ways I see to practice some of this myself. When someone starts to do something differently than I would do it, let me keep my mouth shut just once. Let me not “judge” that they are wrong. When I hear a politician say something I cannot agree with, let me not say, “He is an evil jerk,” but let me breathe and pray, “Spirit of God, transform us all” – and let me try being an irritant or leaven by writing postcards or working to get someone else elected. And if I *do* feel the need to sort out all the stuff in the fishing net, let me look at the net that is my own life – let me sort all the “stuff” I’ve accumulated and recognize that it’s not all worth keeping. Let me do some downsizing – in both my interior and exterior lives. Let me keep what I need, and give away the rest. Let me keep relationships and bury long-held grudges. Yes, let me do that kind of sorting. And that, my friends, will keep me so busy that I won’t have time to judge anyone else.

Amen.

[1 Kings 3:5-12](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp12_RCL.html#ot2)[Psalm 119:129-136](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp12_RCL.html#ps2)[Romans 8:26-39](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp12_RCL.html#nt1)[Matthew 13:31-33,44-52](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp12_RCL.html#gsp1)