

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 12A

1 Kings 3:5-12
 Psalm 128
 Romans 8:26-39
 Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

JULY 30, 2023

St. David's Episcopal Church
 N. Chesterfield, Virginia
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YEARS AGO, AFTER RETIRING FROM THE NAVY, MY HUSBAND BOB TOOK A POSITION IN A NON-DENOMINATIONAL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION. IT WAS AN INTERESTING LEAP FROM NAVY LIFE TO WORKING IN THIS ORGANIZATION. FOR ME AT FIRST, IT WAS A EXCITING , OPENING NEW AND DIFFERENT DOORS; BUT IN THE END, THERE WAS DISILLUSIONMENT.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE TIMES THAT FORCED ME TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE REALIZATION THAT THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM. A VENEER OF PIETY AND SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT MAKE A PERSON OR ORGANIZATION HOLY OR SAINTLY. SOME ENDEAVORS THAT BEGAN WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS, WHEN PRESSED BY THE WORLD'S STANDARDS AND ITS OWN SELF-CENTERED NEEDS CAN RESULT IN SPIRITUAL ARROGANCE, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS – EVEN FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS.

AT ONE POINT DURING THIS TIME, BOB AND I ATTENDED A CONFERENCE FOR THE ORGANIZATION. AS I WAS NOT A DELEGATE, I WAS FREE TO ROAM AROUND. IN DOING SO, I OVER-HEARD MANY INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS AND SAW WELL KNOWN, PRESTIGIOUS PEOPLE WHO WERE PRESENT, FROM POLITICIANS TO , ENTREPREURS TO CELEBRITIES.

I EXPERIENCED WHAT IT WAS LIKE BEING IN THE MIDST OF PALPABLE, SHEER, RAW POWER. THOUGH THEIR AIMS AND GOALS WERE COUCHED IN BIBLICAL TERMS THEIR EFFORTS WERE VERY SECULAR. THE KINGDOM THEY WERE SEEKING WAS NOT THE ONE JESUS DESCRIBED IN TODAY'S LESSON. THEIR KINGDOM WAS OF THIS

WORLD. IT WAS NOT A KINGDOM OF GOD'S LOVE, BUT ONE OF SEEKING EARTHLY POWER AND CONTROL.

BOB LASTED ONLY A YEAR IN HIS POSITION. WHEN HE REFUSED TO GO ALONG WITH THE TACTICS OF THE ORGANIZATION, HE WAS TERMINATED – FIRED! I WAS SHOCKED AND DISILLUSIONED. HOW COULD A CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATION BE JUST LIKE ANY OTHER SECULAR ORGANIZATION?.

AS SO OFTEN HAPPENS, OUT OF TRAGEDY AND UPSET NEW DOORS OPENED. IT GAVE BOB TIME TO STUDY HEBREW BEFORE ENTERING SEMINARY. IN SOME WAYS IT BEGAN MY PROCESS TOWARD SEMINARY AND BEING ORDAINED..

I REALIZE THAT THE MEN AND WOMEN GATHERED THAT WEEKEND THOUGHT THEY WERE DOING SOMETHING GOOD AND HOLY, WHEN IN ESSENCE THEY WERE SEEKING EARTHLY POWER UNDER THE GUISE OF RELIGIOUS RIGHTEOUSNESS. TO ME THEY MISSED THE MARK. THEY MISUNDERSTOOD “THE KINGDOM” -- SOMEHOW THEY BELIEVED THEY COULD CREATE AND CONTROL GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH.

SO, WHAT IS GOD'S KINGDOM LIKE? IN DESCRIBING IT, JESUS GAVE US FIVE EXAMPLES TO PONDER: HE SAID, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE:

THE PLANTING OF A MUSTARD SEED – THAT GROWS INTO A TREE SO LARGE IT BECOME A HOME AND PLACE OF WELCOME FOR THE ALL BIRDS OF THE AIR – OPEN, WELCOMING, ALL ENCOMPASSING – INCLUSIVE.

THE KINGDOM IS LIKE A WOMAN MIXING YEAST INTO FLOUR SO IT WILL RISE AND EXPAND UNTIL IS READY TO BE BAKED INTO BREAD – THUS PROVIDING FOOD – NOURISHMENT, LIFE FOR ALL.

THE KINGDOM IS LIKE A MAN FINDING A TREASURE IN A FIELD, WHO SELLS EVERYTHING HE HAS TO BUY THE FIELD AND GAIN THIS TREASURE.

OR THE KINGDOM IT IS LIKE ANOTHER MAN SELLING ALL THAT HE HAS TO PURCHASE A PEARL OF GREAT PRICE. BOTH THE FIELD WITH TREASURE AND THE WITH THE PEARL ARE OF INFINITE VALUE.

FINALLY, THE KINGDOM IS LIKE A HUGE NET THROWN INTO THE SEA BRINGING IN AN ENORMOUS CATCH OF FISH – WIDE, DIVERSE, ALL ENCOMPASSING..

WHAT IS GOD’S KINGDOM LIKE? IT IS NOT SELF SERVING, EXCLUSIVE, SECRETIVE, OR NARROW LIKE THAT CONFERENCE YEARS AGO.

GOD’S KINGDOM IS LIKE

THE MUSTARD SEED’S TREE, WIDE AND EXPANSIVE – OPEN ENDED,

LIKE THE YEAST – THAT WORKS QUIETLY AND EFFECTIVELY CREATING SOMETHING NEW AND SPECIAL.

LIKE THE PEARL AND THE TREASURE THAT ARE OF INFINITE VALUE, A BLESSING TO ALL.

FINALLY IT IS LIKE THE NET BRINGING IN A HUGE CATCH OF DIVERSE FISH. INCLUSIVE – VARIED – ALL ENCOMPASSING.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS NOT SOMEWHERE UP THE SKY, OR OUT THERE IN THE GALAXY. IT’S NOT SOMETHING ONLY FOR A FEW. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS HERE, RIGHT NOW -- IN YOU AND IN ME!. IT’S AMONG US. IT’S IN US. IT’S AROUND US ALWAYS WORKING QUIETLY.

FOR TOO LONG THE CHURCH LIMITED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS BY TEACHING THAT THE ONLY WAY TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WAS BY LIVING LIVES OF GOODNESS, FOLLOWING JESUS, AND KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS. IN A WAY IT’S LIKE A SANTA CLAUS GOSPEL!. IF YOU’RE GOOD, YOU’LL BE REWARDED WITH PRESENTS FROM SANTA. IF YOU’RE GOOD, WHEN YOU DIE YOU’LL GET TO GO

TO HEAVEN. FOR CENTURIES IT KEPT GOD'S PEOPLE COWED, IN LINE AND OBEDIENT. THIS IS NOT GOD'S WAY!!.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS HERE, NOW...., PRESENT.... AMONG US. ST. PAUL UNDERSTOOD THIS. WRITING TO THE ROMANS, HE SPOKE OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE – JEW AND GENTILE. HE KNEW WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT GOD CREATED ALL THINGS – ALL OF US. ALL WHO HAVE EVER LIVED HAVE BEEN CREATED AND LOVED BY GOD. – IN ROMANS, PAUL ASKED, “IF GOD IS FOR US WHO IS AGAINST US?” (Romans 8:31b)

HE REMINDS US THAT NOTHING

will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . 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. (Romans 8:35-36,38-39)

IN THOSE MOMENTS WHEN WE WONDER WHERE IS GOD? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TOMORROW, OR THE DAY AFTER? AND, WE WORRY! BUT, AS CHRISTIANS, FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, WE ARE CALLED TO REMEMBER –

WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED CHILDREN. NOTHING – NOTHING WILL EVER SEPARATE US FROM GOD IN CHRIST. WE'RE TO TRUST THAT GOD IS WITH US, AROUND US AND IN US.

AFTER BOB WAS FIRED, FOR A TIME, I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO SENSE GOD'S LOVE. YET IN HIND SIGHT I KNOW NOW THIS A PART OF MY JOURNEY TO A DEEPER FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD. GOD'S SONG OF PROMISE AND HOPE RUNS THROUGH THE ENTIRE GALAXY..

GOD IS PRESENT IN ALL THINGS –

AROUND US, IN US,

SUPPORTING US.

WE ARE NEVER ALONE. GOD IS ALWAYS PRESENT – WELCOMING AND LOVING US.

GOD IS OF INFINITE WORTH AND BLESSING

OFTEN HIDDEN – UNSEEN, YET QUIETLY WORKING..

INCLUSIVE, ACCEPTING, AND LOVING OF EACH OF US.