

Time after Pentecost JULY 26, 2020 Worship at Home Lect A

Good morning – welcome to worship at home with our service of word & prayer for JULY 26, 2020.

I am Maureen Rueckwald a long time-volunteer at St. John's Lutheran Church. I hope you are able to gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don't have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the ELW book. Prayers are from Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light a candle.

The Gathering

Call to Worship

Call to the Lord, who hears our prayers.
Wait for the Lord, the source of our hope.
Sing to the Lord, who delights in our songs.
Let us worship.

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

The first Hymn today is – from WOV 778 O Christ the Same

The Prayer of the Day – let us pray

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.**

The WORD

Please stop this video and read the scriptures at your own speed and I will read the gospel lesson for today:

1 Kings 3: 5-12 Psalm **119:129-136** Romans **8:26-39** Matthew **13:31-33,44-52**

Our homily today is written and delivered by our own Bishop Michael Pryse of the Eastern Synod.

Bishop Michael Pryse, Eastern Synod

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

During the brief few years of his public ministry, one thing Jesus never tired of describing was the kingdom of heaven; the reign of God. And Jesus' descriptions of the kingdom often came as contradiction to what his listeners expect or want to hear. They sought a new reign – a new kingdom - that would come to God's people in a big way; powerfully, decisively and quite deservedly! But, instead, Jesus persists in describing the kingdom using common imagery from everyday life, as a reality that comes slowly, unexpectedly and “most undeservedly!”

It's all about grace and the parables included in today's Gospel lesson are pictures that describe a kingdom of grace; a reign of grace. The tiny mustard seed grows into a tree that becomes a nesting place for the birds of the air! The birds didn't and couldn't do anything to make it happen. The seed – the kingdom – grew of its own volition and nature! It's pure grace!

Likewise, the yeast – “the kingdom” – is mixed by a baker – “God” – into three measures of flour – “the world.” Keep in mind that those three biblical measures

are the equivalent of a bushel basket; 128 cups or 16 five-pound bags of flour! Furthermore, when the baker adds the 42 or so cups of water needed to make it come together, you are talking about 100 pounds of dough throughout which she needs to disburse the yeast! (This woman must've had forearms like Popeye!) But she does it. God kneads that dough until the yeast - the kingdom - is disbursed throughout the dough; until its everywhere! That's the only way dough can become bread. The yeast breathes life into the loaf. It is a gift of grace.

Jesus then goes on to liken the kingdom to a great treasure that someone "found." He didn't earn it or make it. He "found it." It's a straight-up gift! And the finder considers it to be so valuable that he sells all his possessions in order to keep it. Likewise with a pearl merchant who "finds" one pearl of great value, perfect in size, composition and colour. It's a once in a lifetime find. It's grace; an amazing, wondrous and unexpected grace. Again, it is worth everything that he has!

Jesus concludes his kingdom riff by describing the kingdom as being like a net, the kind you drag through the sea. It catches fish of all kinds, seeming without any discrimination until the net is full. Good fish, bad fish; it makes no differences. They are all are caught up in the kingdom. It's a picture of God's grace; about the amazing breadth and capacity of the reign of God!

And it is only then, after laying out these five parable pictures of this grace-steeped, grace-infused kingdom that Jesus finally turns to the question of what will happen in eternity, at the end of the age, when after the great resurrection, there is a time of judgement. And let's be honest, that's the place where most of us would prefer to begin the discussion of the kingdom! "Enough with these cryptic fables!" Finally

we get the kind of “gun barrel justice” we would expect from any king worthy to wear a crown!

But don't be so quick! Context always matters and we need to read these words recognizing that the rhetorical weight of Jesus' whole discourse has to do with the graciousness and universal breadth of the reign of God. The kingdom is a free and undeserved gift that you can't earn, create or manufacture. Therefore, inasmuch as God will one day provide judgement, we can assume and trust that this is a judge whose nature it is to acquit everyone, to free everyone.

The Scriptures do of course tell us that, sadly, there are some who will reject this kingdom and the reconciliation that God gifts to us through it. And the outcome of that choice is a self-judgement. And who could imagine a worse hell?

Episcopal theologian and author Robert Farrar Capon describes it this way; “the very hell of hell lies precisely in the fact that its inhabitants will be insisting on a perpetual rejection of an equally perpetual gift. It will be an eternal struggle to escape from the gift of a love that will never let them go.” Can you imagine a darker hell than that?

It has been said, and wisely so, that it is only by being little that we can ever discover anything that is big. To a small child everything seems big. Mom and Dad are like giants. You go to school for the first time and the place is huge! It's only when you grow up that you come to see that mom and dad weren't so big after all and that the vast school only had eight classrooms. When you are little, everything

seems big. Likewise, in matters of faith, it's only by being little that you can really imagine and experience those things that are big.

I think this is also a key point of the gospel. The kingdom that Jesus describes is always recognized from a perspective of smallness and humility; a perspective where the first become last and the last become first. And maybe the only way for us to start recognizing the reign that Jesus points toward, the only way for us to more fully experience God's reign of grace; the kingdom of heaven; is by taking the risk making ourselves just a little bit smaller.

About 30 years ago Canadian author Douglas Coupland burst onto the literary scene with a novel whose title coined the now familiar term Generation X. In his follow-up short story collection entitled *Life After God*, Coupland describes the Gen-Xers as perhaps the first generation to experience a life without God. It reads as a lament for a generation that feels very much adrift but also carries prominent grace notes of hope!

Near the end of the book he tells a friend about an experience he had in Stanley Park in Vancouver "Did I ever tell you," I said, "about the time last year in Stanley Park when Mark and I went rollerblading?" "No." "There was this group of blind people, with white canes and everything; a CNIB tour or something. They heard us coming and they motioned for us to stop and we did. Then they handed Mark a camera and asked him to take their picture." "Blind people?" "Exactly. But the strange thing was, they still believed in sight. In pictures."

On the last page of the book Coupland shares a secret with us. He writes, "Now here is my secret. I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever

achieve again, so I pray you are in a quiet room as you read these words. My secret is that I need God; that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem capable of giving; to help me be kind because I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love."

Although he might use different words to describe it, Coupland has taken the first and most important step toward discovering the kingdom, a state of being of experience that proceeds, not from bigness and power, but from smallness and humility; a state that is found in recognizing our complete neediness and dependence upon the grace and love of the one who is the author and source of all of existence.

I believe that our world and its inhabitants have a deep desire to experience that kingdom today. Many of us know the emptiness and hollowness of the false gospels upon which dominate much of life today. The hunger for a new way of living is evident all around us. As blind as our world sometimes seems, as blind as we often are, I think that most of us still believe in pictures; in the possibility of a better way, a renewed world; a new kingdom.

This time of living through a pandemic has amplified the pangs of that hunger. It has prodded and inspired acts of kindness and generosity; a renewed care for and love for creation and community. The righteous appeals of anti-racism protesters around the world have pulled at our hearts and pricked our consciences. We long for something better. We hunger for and long to see and experience that life which is life indeed; life in its intended justness, fullness and abundance; life in the kingdom!

Today we are given an opportunity to renew our residency in that special kingdom whose embrace has come to us as a gift that is predicated fully and completely upon God's grace; not upon what we have or don't have; not on what we've done or not done. The kingdom is already within us and around us! God's already given it! All we need to do is live it! AMEN.

Our hymn of the day is # ELW 781 or LBW 474 Children of The Heavenly Father

The Prayers of the people are led today by Andy Kalnins.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE FOR JULY 26 2020

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

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; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Remove the obstacles so that a vaccine for Covid may be created. 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. 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 *especially those we name before you now.* Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this congregation to 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. 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.**

Please join me in saying the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.

Our sending hymn is HYMN LBW # 221 or ELW# 547 Sent Forth by God's blessing

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal: Go in peace.

In Christ, the kingdom of heaven is near! **Thanks be to God.**