

Sermon 7/27/14 Proper 12A Aurora

It was 1968. I was in my first semester at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale in New Haven Connecticut. The turmoil of closing and selling out my life in Chicago, quitting a promising career teaching, and leaving behind family and friends was taking it's toll. I had little money as I entered three years of graduate level study to become an Episcopal priest. What in the world had I done?

Did I really have a call? Would I find the intellectual, physical financial and emotional resources to make it through?

A few weeks later, it was on my mind as I sat robed in the medieval splendor of a sub-deacon. I was in the sanctuary of a little church in Lake Success, Long Island, NY for the solemn celebration of the Eucharist for the feast of St. Michael and All Angels. Fr. Robert Meany, had taken me under his wing thanks to some referrals from former students of his, now priests. He had been their tutor at The General Theological Seminary in NYC.

I was to chant the Epistle on that hot September evening in a tiny church appointed with a splendid baroque altarware. Looking back, the whole setup was really quite presumptuous. All this stuff in a cement block building about the size of three car garage!

While the psalm was being sung, I became lost in my thoughts and not paying much attention. Suddenly, a voice called out my name: Thomas! I looked up fearing that I had missed my cue to move into place for the reading. I jerked upwards and was about to move, when I realized everyone was still merrily singing the psalm. The priest grabbed my arm and pulled me back into my seat next to him on the sedellia. After a few minutes my heart still surging with adrenaline, I got my signal from the Master of ceremonies and was lead to the place I was the "perform".

In the sacristy after the service, the priest ask what had happened at that moment. I told him how I was distracted with fears and doubts and thought I'd missed my cue. With his sage advise and compassionate guidance, I realized that the calling of my name which I heard so emphatically was an answer to my desperate longing for assurance that I should pursue my course to the priesthood.

Of course, no one else heard my name shouted and few would believe I'd actually heard a voice. But I was absolutely sure and still rely on that experience of God encountered in an anxious moment. I wasn't connect or focused on the liturgy as I should have been. I hadn't been

storming the heavens with a plea. Yet being in the midst of worship with the congregation, in the house of God, making Eucharist. Something within me opened up and I was touched.

How many times have you knelt to pray with a heavy heart and discovered you had no idea what to say? When you are in emotional, physical and/or spiritually pain and turn desperately to God, you may

not even know how to begin crying for help? You're ready to pray---but how do you pray for what?

St. Paul says that the Spirit is helping you when you don't know how to pray. You can't put your prayers into words: but the Spirit prompts with "sighs too deep for words,"--- and God hears and God understands. God not only hears your prayers but also helps you utter them when you are in deep distress. The Holy Spirit, Christ's own Spirit, dwelling within you intercedes to the Father. Just as

Christ sits at the right hand of God to, as it were, whisper support for you to the Father. So also the Spirit not merely stands besides you, but by abiding within you strengthens you by energizing and

inspiring the inarticulate longings of the soul. This Divine intercession gives utterance to your sighs; God seated upon the Throne of Grace and Power receives your great longings for God hears within

Himself the mind of the Spirit. It is God's own Presence engaging the movement of the Spirit and coming to know your aspirations.

Believe it or not... it is as such times that we enter more deeply into the Kingdom of God. What a surprise that when issues of faith and belief may be muddled, challenged or doubted, we are closer to a

caring and loving God by means of the dwelling Holy Spirit within us. Even when our faith or hope is but a tiny flicker in the center of our anxious lives, it can affect us profoundly.

Like the mustard seed, from small things, unexpected things, there are eventually enormous results. Jesus in the parables today tells us that what we have been searching for is indeed a rich treasure. it

comes unexpectedly but we instantly recognize it as something of great value. While searching it becomes more and more apparent that what you seek is of great value. Such is the Journey of Faith.

As the search, the journey proceeds you will discover truer, lovelier things. Yet eventually it seems many are just passing adventures; experiences constantly being surpassed. The infinite worth of the

Kingdom of God, in our yearning, our quest for that peace that passes understanding is indeed something for which you want to give everything you have. Included are the earlier satisfactions, beliefs, and/or stations in life in which you once, so completely delighted. They lose their lust and the time to change begins.

The Kingdom of God is always near, but something we may only get a glimpse of from time to time. Perhaps an evolving change or growing awareness that there is more around the corner. In some ways it is already here, yet coming into focus more and more. The workings of God's kingdom are already in and among us in surprising ways, if only we truly have eyes to see and ears to hear. These parables show how one can stumble upon the kingdom without really seeking it while others may be searching through all sorts of substitutes before grasping the quest successfully.

I am reminded of a recent thunderstorm working its way across the state. I thought of how God's loving rule and reign is like such a summer storm. We can hear it coming, smell it in the air, with apprehension we await its refreshing winds and rains.

The message we all want to hear is the Gospel's Good News. We can begin to trust in God's ultimate victory and celebrate the joy even now. "If God is for us, who can be against us? God gave us his Son, Will God withhold anything from us?" God has put us in the right. Christ Jesus does not correct or chastise without extending the pathway of enriching and improving our lives in the here and now as we await the final fulfillment.

The point is that heavenly treasure is ours for the taking but we cannot measure the value in earthly terms. God's kingdom is a gift beyond any commodity or good fortune that may be possible to imagine. Whatever we trade off to be in the kingdom of God is not only well worth it, but such things become rather meaningless by comparison.

The changes you so often seek in your intercessions, in your prayers, in your deepest moment

are most often in the only place that you can really ever change, your own self, your own heart and mind. Please remember that you can change your circumstances always for with God the possibilities are endless.

We ourselves need to enter into the kingdom stories, join in the conversation and begin to live out the truth of the Kingdom as a treasure, a pearl, like a fishing excursion for the salvation of souls.

The parables go whizzing by, telling us first the Kingdom is like this, then like that... It can't be pinned down or described exclusively in one way. We follow the stories, see them all in our mind's eye, gather what meaning we can and suddenly, surprisingly, the kaleidoscope shifts to reveal yet another pattern, another pathway. Yes our deepest longings, our deep sighs and cries can be and in some way always answered. Then once again we recognize we are in the the presence of the Kingdom of God. Amen.