

Church of the Good Shepherd

and

St. John the Evangelist

11 Pentecost
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Fr. Bill McGinty

“Where is your Treasure?”

The story of God’s salvation and his plans for Israel begin to unfold in today’s first reading from the Book of Genesis. Jacob loves Rachael with all his heart, but Rachael’s father Laban is a wile old fox. He knows that if he lets Jacob marry Rachael, his eldest daughter Leah will be left on the shelf with everyone saying: “What’s the matter with her?” Laban loves both his daughters and refuses to allow that to happen; so he tricks Jacob into marrying Leah.

In the story all the sympathy goes to Jacob, but it is it is truly misplaced. The real hero of the piece is Leah. She had no choice, but to go along with her Father’s plan, knowing that Jacob does not love her, but was totally in love with her younger sister. Leah makes a wonderful wife and is totally devoted to being a mother. Jacob does not seem to complain too loudly, as Leah goes on to give him ten children. There is reason to call Leah the mother of Israel, because it is from her sons that the twelve tribes or at least ten of them derive.

Jacob does finally marry Rachael and she gives him two children, Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob does not only give all his love and favor to Rachael, but he transfers that treatment to her sons, especially Joseph. As children we always hated when parents or teachers played the favorites game, yet it abounds in the Old testament where even God is depicted as definitely having favorites. Rachael goes on to become the Queen of all Jewish hearts while poor Leah is reduced in history to always be considered second best. That story is of course repeated in the New Testament story of Martha and Mary.

So often in our lives too, we are tempted to think that there is so much imbalance and unfairness. I once worked for a school principal who appointed all his pals to important posts in the school. The vice principal, assistant principal, Head of this, Head of that were all appointed with very little talent because they were friends of his. The rest of us had to feel that we were Leah doing all the work, producing the results while they soaked up the glory. It is hard to believe that you can get away with building your own little Kingdom using other people’s lives in this day and age, but in a closed system we have all seen how easy it is. Jesus warns his disciples against it and tries to teach them about a new kind of Kingdom.

Paul writing in the eighth Chapter of Romans touches on the Spirit of Christ’s Kingdom and what it can truly mean in our life. He tells us that even in the midst of the frantic hustle and bustle of our day, there is something else going on that we are a part of. There is a life of the Spirit where our soul communes with God in a constant conversation and

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that those messages are carried back and forth not by Angels, but by the Holy Spirit of God itself. Paul tells us that nothing can break that bond. It is as strong as the bond between parent and child. “Who will separate us from the love of God?” Paul asks. “Will hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword?”

It is of course a rhetorical question; nothing can separate us from God as long as we are connected to Christ. That connection can only be broken by our free choice. Our choice of sin severs us from Christ and from the love of God. It is as if the Spirit of Christ cannot dwell in darkness. When we choose darkness, Christ’s Spirit leaves us. We need dispel the darkness in order to be re-united with Christ; we need to seek forgiveness and return to living a righteous life.

Today’s Gospel is one of my favorite because it is so conspiratorial. Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven and how it is spread from person to person; place to place and how it finds the cracks and grows in unexpected places until it touches human hearts. And from being something small and insignificant it becomes an enormous force. “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast in a loaf of bread. The Kingdom is like a treasure in a field. The Kingdom of Heaven is like finding a rare pearl. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea.”

Jesus asks the disciples if they understand. They all say “yes”, but they really don’t have a clue. The truth is that the Kingdom of Heaven is a way of life. It is God’s way of life. Jesus’ secret is that he drags that style of life, love and forgiveness down to the level of man and says: “Can you live like this? Can you find happiness by the way you love and treat others, in service and generosity of spirit and will you pass it on?”

Yet, Jesus does not leave his audience hanging. He goes on to give them an answer to every metaphor he has given them of the Kingdom. The mustard seed grows to a tree that shelters all. Therefore plant the seed. Bake the bread. Buy the field. Purchase the pearl. Caste the net.

Jesus’ Kingdom does not just happen. There is something we need to do. In the old movie and novel “Swiss Family Robinson”, the Robinson family is immigrating to Australia in the 1800’s. They are cast ashore on an island in the Pacific when their ship sinks in a storm. Over the next five years the Island of Jungle becomes their home. There they have to learn to live and work together in order to survive. As time goes on they are forced to learn new skills and become enormously dependant on one another. By the time they are rescued they truly know and have experienced what living as a family means.

Jesus’ Kingdom of Heaven works something like that. The Kingdom has high ideals and the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount call us to live by God’s values and standard. But

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the Kingdom itself is an activity. It is by living and doing it that we come closest to achieving the sort of experience of God that Jesus is constantly talking about.

Still, written into this Gospel of Matthew Chapter 13, is the clear instruction that Christians must also be Evangelists. Plant the seed, buy the field and cast out the net, all speak to us of the need to spread the Gospel. We are all tied into the conspiracy because we know the secret, we have been told the story, now we too must share it with others.

This week as you go about your business do something that plants the seed of the Gospel in another. For you know that the faith that is in each and everyone of us, was not planted or put there by us. No! It was the work and labor of some one else, now long gone. They planted, sowed, and nurtured that young faith so many years of hoping it would mature, take root and grow in knowledge and in wisdom.

Such is the way Christ's Kingdom grows a man went out and discovered a treasure in a field. A man went out and found a pearl of great price. Today's Gospel has us ask where is my treasure? Where is my pearl? How do I nurture it and allow it to grow?

Our faith is a precious thing. Let us not take it for granted, but allow it to be the guiding principal of our life.

Amen+

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