



Eight Sunday after Pentecost A 7/26/20

*We Are Pearls of Great Value*

The Rev. Laurie Rofinot

Christ Church, Needham, MA

In the name of God...AMEN.

Good morning to you at the beginning of this heat wave! God willing, we will have more temperate weather at the end of this week.

So, this morning's Gospel reading treats us to the last of Jesus' Parables of the Kingdom. They all start with something like, the K of H or the K of G is like ...and then a little story. Two weeks ago we heard about the farmer who sowed seed, first snatched away by birds, then sown on rocky, dry, thorny and finally fertile ground, where it brought forth lots and lots of grain. Then last week we heard about the farmer who allowed weeds to grow along with his wheat, complete with an allegorical explanation: Jesus is the farmer, the field is the world, people who follow God are the good grain, people of darkness are the poisonous weeds.

Finally this morning Jesus gives us five different ways to imagine God's Kingdom, that is God's action and work in the world: as a tiny mustard seed, as yeast hidden in bread dough, as a treasure hidden in a field, as a fishing net catching many fish, and finally as a pearl of great value. It's this last story I would like to focus on this morning, and my remarks include the words of my clergy colleague, the Rev. Kirk Kubicek, a priest in Maryland.

Kirk recalled our beloved bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts, Thomas Shaw, now departed these past almost 6 years. In addition to being a great bishop, Tom was also a wonderful spiritual director and retreat leader. One year he spoke to Kirk's clergy group about this parable, "The Pearl of Great Value." He began by saying that actually our God is a very frugal God who does not waste one iota, not one little jot or tittle, of our life experience. He kind of makes God sound a little like an old New England Yankee - very frugal. The point is that God values and savors each moment of our lives, who we are and what we are doing - especially the work we do for God's kingdom.

And a hidden, ironic truth embedded in the Good News of Jesus Christ, is that at the end of the day each one of us is the Pearl of Great Value. We are God's beloved. And to show us how much God loves us, God sent Jesus, the divine Son, to walk among us, to dwell among us, to show us through his precious life the ways of God.

God in fact values our lives so much that even when Jesus was horribly killed on a cross - God's only, beloved Son - God did not abandon us to sin and death. But instead returned him to us, so that wherever communities of Christians are together, Jesus himself is in the midst of us. And these days of course that means zoom and facebook live and social distancing with masks - safely apart, together. Jesus is in the midst of us. Bishop Shaw would have lamented the coronavirus of course, but he would have urged all of us to think of ourselves as Pearls of Great Value, hidden in this world, for which God was willing to pay a great price: the ultimate price. God sold everything, as it were, to obtain us, to redeem us, to bring us home. Jesus is ever calling us back to God: whether we recognize it or not, even in the midst

of all these crises, our health crisis, our climate crisis, our economic and political crisis, the assault on our collective mental and emotional and spiritual and physical well-being, the crisis in our racial relations and police brutality - whether we can recognize it or even see it these days, we have to take it on faith that we are beloved, that we come from love, we return to love, and love is all around. God is our beginning and our end.

Now to get back to Kirk and his group, Bishop Shaw then issued them a prayer challenge. Now I had heard him say this very thing, maybe one of my clergy conferences - it was so him, so unique, offering us a wonderful twist on the way we usually think of prayer. He said, we are so beloved that we really need to take time each day to allow God to tell us how precious we are, and to allow God to thank US for what we have done for God today. Every day we are called to sit for a while in our prayer time and allow ourselves to feel God thanking us for all that we do for God in this world, just let it wash over us.

It reminded me that, during this coronavirus pandemic, I have probably watched way more television than is healthy for me. I finally discovered Netflix. And one of my favorite shows has been the BBC's, "Call the Midwife," a show based on someone's real life experience in the poor, chaotic East End of London in the 1950s and 60s, lots of babies being born, and a group of nurse-midwives who were also Anglican nuns, closing out their workday with Compline and Anglican Chant. At one point, when a colleague felt overwhelmed and helpless, the elderly nun, Sr. Monica Joan, very kindly said to her, "You know, the hands of the Almighty are so often to be found at the ends of our own arms." It was perfect. A paraphrase of Teresa of Avila for our own time.

Because that is how we accomplish God's work in this world, and for which God is so grateful. So the question is, can we really just simply believe that God loves us so much? Can we allow ourselves to feel like Pearls of Great Value? It is central to the life of faith to accept and receive God's love - to know how much our God values us and everything that we do and are.

This is why all these kingdom parables are so important to us. They each point to the hidden-ness of God's reign right here in our midst and they suggest that the life of faith begins with something as small as a tiny bit of yeast or a single minute mustard seed, something hard to see, maybe hard to recognize as faith. So the disciples asked Jesus for more faith before he sent them out into the world. But he said, "You just need a little bit of faith. With just the smallest amount of faith you can move mountains - you can do the things that I do, and even greater things!"

We don't need to do big and heroic things. I had the privilege of turning 64 this week, and while I may have done a few heroic things in my life, I've definitely had to ratchet down my expectations of what's possible. But God tells even me that I am one of God's own pearls of great value. The truth is that every little loving thing we do in and for this suffering world brings a smile to God's face. And the more we let God thank us, ironically the more confident and empowered we become as God's own people. And soon



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the people around us and the people we meet begin to feel like pearls of great value as well. As the old song says, Love isn't love until you give it away.

It does begin with faith. But all we really need is faith as small as a mustard seed to make the whole creation new. To give new life to our own sometimes tired bodies. To put a smile on the face of a stranger. To plant seeds of God's love throughout our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, our schools, at home.

And so I invite you to pray as Pearls of Great Value to God. Spending time in stillness and silence, give God the time to thank you for who you are and for what you have done for God today. The life of faith begins with accepting God's love into our hearts, minds, and souls. Without that, we are nothing. With God's love poured into our hearts we become Pearls of Great Value. **AMEN.**