

07-26-2020 CUMC (8th Sunday after Pentecost); **Theme 39: Praise God**

(G) Genesis 29:15-28; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Opening Prayer: *O Father in heaven, in praise and thanks we come before you. Open our eyes to the beauty of your blessings and illumine our paths. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Praise God for God's Grace

Grace is a word with many meanings. How do we understand this grace? In the Bible, the most widely used meaning is God's love; John Wesley's prevenient grace, the instrument God reveals even before our knowledge of God: for the redemption of human beings (justification); and, the sustaining influence that enables a believer to persevere in the Christian life and aspire to perfection (sanctification).

Spiritual Growth & Values (Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52)

Spiritual growth (Matthew 13:31-33)

In the Gospel of Matthew are teachings concerning "the kingdom of heaven," presented in parables. We went through the parable of the wheat and tares/weeds last week which says the coming of the kingdom of heaven will be preceded by an age in which good and evil co-exist.

Here, the Kingdom is likened to a mustard seed and yeast/leaven. A mustard seed is small. The particular specie found in Palestine did grow tall and big enough for birds to nest in (similar to one here in the PNW). It symbolizes that even the greatest of all things begins in a small way; that the smallest seed can grow completely out of proportion to its initial size. Here, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God starts small and then grows into something unexpected.

If we will go by the Big Bang Theory of the birth of the universe we will realize that it was only a tiny event that started with one substance to what is now at least 15 billion light years in size. But what is yeast/leaven? This is a piece of dough left over from a previous baking session, that when kneaded into the dough, expands all of it. The Jews used it to illustrate evil and impurity because leaven/yeast is actually spoiled dough.

Jesus uses the dynamic character of yeast to illustrate the quality of the Kingdom of God to transform. A small amount of yeast mixed into 50 lbs. of flour will produce 100 loaves of bread. God's own leaven will grow into the fulfillment of God's promise, which by Divine Grace allows us salvation and eternal life. Rather than being powered by armies or organizations, the kingdom of God will grow by an internal dynamic component, the Holy Spirit.

Together, these two parables symbolize that the Kingdom of God through the grace of God, start from humble beginnings that can transform everything. This is an encouragement to continue our works for the glory of God because what Jesus Christ started is guaranteed to continue until victory is achieved...until the grace of God covers the universe and eternity.

Spiritual values (Matthew 13:44-52)

Josephus, an ancient Jewish historian, speaks of "the gold and the silver and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had, and which the owners treasured up underground against the uncertain fortunes of war."

Palestine was and is a war zone because of its strategic geographic location. There were no banks as we know of them today. Their banks were the earth. When there was threat/invasion, there was the scramble to bury things of value.

This would be of interest to almost everyone's fantasy (metal detectors). The treasure might have been buried by someone long ago and/or forgotten. The man who found the hidden treasure might have been a field hand, who decided not to reveal this to the landowner who would have only kept it for himself though it would almost surely be not his nor his family's. The point of the parable was not about the ownership of the treasure but the value.

Similarly, we might not think much of pearls as much as we think of diamonds but in those days pearls were like diamonds in value, sourced from the waters of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and they would have cost millions of dollars in today's currency. To a lot of people, a beautiful pearl was worth all that they owned.

Therefore the Kingdom of God was being compared to these items of value, value that warranted giving up all material wealth for. The parable of the net follows this idea. Those who value the Kingdom with all that they have will be separated from those who do not.

This is God's Grace

Jacob, for all his imperfections had a great romantic love for Rachel and worked 14 years to gain her as his spouse. Paul is saying that we do not know how to pray (talk to God) but that the Holy Spirit prays for us. All things work together for good---for those who love God. Those who love God are those who are called by God. God does everything so that God's plan for our salvation comes to fruition. No one is predestined for anything, but we are all conveniently created to be with God in Grace. All we have to do is decide to be on God's side in every aspect and turning point in our lives.

Jesus asks, "Do you understand?" The ending sentence of the whole passage likens a person who gives value to the Kingdom as someone who can dispense of wisdom like a rich person who gives out new or old gold coins from the treasure box. Jesus might as well have been talking to us, too.

Our relationship with Jesus does not merely transform us but also refines us so that we become like polished diamonds from the rough. Though the first individual found his treasure by accident, the second found his by diligent search. No matter how a person is led to Christ's kingdom, its values and delights will be beyond estimation.

You are invited to come into God's presence and renew this covenant with him through Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the main and only instrument of God's grace by which we can achieve perfection and be transformed and transported for/to eternal life.

Closing Prayer: *Great is thy faithfulness dear God, our Father. You have blessed us with so much but we give back so little in return. Throughout this day, empower us so that we can serve others. May you find us faithful also. In the name of Jesus, amen.*

