

Proper 12, Year A

I must confess to you that often times when I look at readings early in the week in beginning preparation for preaching on Sunday I wonder if there isn't some cosmic plan in place that somehow allows the most difficult readings to fall on Associate Rectors while the more preachable readings fall on the Sundays when the Rector, or a visiting preacher is scheduled to preach- perhaps some God-based, or lectionary based learning program designed to challenge the newly ordained to combat the difficult readings early on so that from that point on preaching will seem less threatening. I also must confess that just the opposite seems to be the case today. The lessons for today are wonderful, absolutely full of good news and with images of Solomon and his dream for Wisdom, and the six Matthean images for the kingdom of heaven and if those aren't enough we have the reading from Romans that is for me the most assuring testimony in all of Scripture. So where to start? What to say? There is just so much here! First thing to do is to search through commentaries, read what the experts have to say about these readings, go to sermon resources, see what the best preachers focus on in these overflowing readings. You may or may not be surprised to learn that when dealing with the wonderful parables about the kingdom of heaven that Jesus relates in the reading from Matthew the scholars focus most of their energy on debunking

the size of the mustard seed as being the smallest. It seems that there are in fact smaller seeds in the known world of Jesus' day or debating the actual size that the outgrowth of the seed. Is it a shrub or a tree? How big does it actually become? Would birds really nest in this shrub/tree or is it too flimsy? And what about yeast? Isn't it usually used to represent something evil rather than something good? Why would Jesus use something that is regularly representative of something evil to represent the kingdom of heaven? Moreover, what about that treasure hidden in the field that someone found? Was it ethical for that person to buy the field in order to obtain a treasure that was obviously not his? Should he have done a title search or a treasure search to find the rightful owner before taking the treasure as his own? Pearl of great price? Or is that Pearl of great value? And what is the difference between price and value and on and on. You get the point. We can allow ourselves to be so caught up in the details of the interchange that we neglect what it is that Jesus is trying to get across. Sounds a bit like the Pharisees doesn't it? I won't even weigh you down with all the comments on the reading from Kings and what is meant by Solomon being a child or whether or not he actually was and what happened in the story from that point on. For today it is enough to look at what is written, what was intended, and especially what implications it might have for us today.

After I read commentaries and sermon resources and found myself quite frustrated I began to attempt to come up with scenarios for myself...for example, the kingdom of heaven is like those tiny little sponge shapes you can buy at toy stores that you soak in water overnight and they grow into full size animals. Nah. The kingdom of heaven is like facebook where an introvert who hates to talk in a crowd can have over a thousand friends he never met-maybe, but not really. This went on all week and nothing really worked and that was fine. Jesus said it just as he meant it and it still works today because this is not about whether a mustard seed is actually the smallest seed in the universe or whether leaven is good or evil or whether the kingdom of heaven is like facebook or if it is ok to buy a field knowing that a treasure is in it. It's about the relationship we have with God and what God is trying God's best to give us. It's about the abundance of God's love and what our response should be to it. This reading, like the reading from Romans, *and* the reading from Kings *and* every other reading from front to finish of Scripture is about what God is doing in relationship to his creation, us, and what our response should be in order for us to fully live into that love and time and again we discover it's about abundance and steadfastness on God's part and giving up with reckless abandon on our part. Or maybe better said, giving *in* with reckless abandon.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that grows disproportionately to the way it begins, but then again think of each of us as having begun as just

one cell at one point. It is a disproportionate reality with God-much bigger than we can imagine. That abundance is followed up and supported with the next parable about the yeast. The woman, we hear, mixed it with three measures of flour. Apparently that is enough flour to make bread for 100-150 people, not daily bread, but perhaps yearly. It's a lot. It's more than enough. That is a constant theme. Remember the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine. He used the water stored for the purification rites-about 180 gallons. That is an abundant amount of wine. Jesus said, he came so that we might have life and have it in abundance. And while these parables point to an abundance of something tangible, they are parables after all and while we here today all know about abundance of stuff, that is not what Jesus is pointing to. He is pointing to the abundance of the love of God, the abundance of the kingdom of God, but first we must enter that kingdom and how do we do that?

We do it with reckless abandon. This is not a toe dipping to test the waters exercise, this is a cannon ball, head under, full force, with all your might exercise. Actually it's not an exercise at all it is a way of life and we have the example in today's readings first with Solomon. Yes, Solomon, who, at least at the time we hear of in our reading today, really got it right. He had a dream in which God asked him what he wanted from God. Imagine that for a moment. Imagine that God came to you in a way that you were absolutely clear that this was God coming to you and asking what you wanted God to do for you. What

would you say? Remove this pain? Heal a broken relationship? Maybe you would be more global in your thinking. End world poverty. World peace, if you don't mind. How about no more catastrophes that are referred to as acts of God? That really gives you a bad name. Solomon didn't do any of those things. He asked for wisdom and God was pleased. Solomon, at that moment in time, humbled himself, removed himself and asked God for the mind to know what was right and consequently to this day Solomon is known for his wisdom, even though he really made some serious errors in judgment later on. At that moment he got it right and he is known thousands of years later for that rightness in that moment.

We have probably all made mistakes, had errors in judgment, done things we wish we had not done. We probably haven't entered the kingdom of heaven with reckless abandon. We may even think that we cannot, we are not worthy of kingdom entrance and for that all we need do is refer back to the writing of Paul in his letter to the Romans –Paul in one of his finer moments. First off when we aren't sure of ourselves, of our own ability even to know how to approach God- what to say- we hear that we have an intercessor, the Holy Spirit who prays with sighs too deep for words. That's good news. Then later we are reminded that if God is with us who can be against us- the only thing I might add to that is ourselves, but even then God wins out – again really good news. And finally we are reassured that nothing can separate us from the love

of God, not death or life or angels or rulers, not things present, or things to come, nor powers nor heights, nor depths nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It doesn't get any better than that! Those are words worthy of reckless abandon of self and stuff and fear and pride and all of those things that we think can keep us from God. God is alive and well and is working long and hard to bring us into this kingdom. Let us put away fear and be like the one who found a pearl of great price and sold everything he had and bought it. Let us joyfully enter the kingdom with reckless abandon. Amen.