



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 30, 2017

Missional Direction

Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52

These past weeks, we have been listening to Jesus teach His own the true work of the disciple--- hearing and receiving the Word sown. Then to be about the work of the disciples in mission, sowing that Word in the world.

Matthew 13 is a course in what it means to do the kingdom work as the family of God redeemed and called to serve.

Jesus is surrounded by crowds and teaches what have been called "the stories of growth." Great mission always begins with small faithful beginnings with the sowing of the Word, generously, recklessly broadcasting in a covering action every ground.

Our first week was simply about sowing seed. Remember? Some along the path, some on rocky soil, other among thorns. Then, good soil where reception of the Word, knowing and understanding it, becomes the fruition of the Body of the Christ in the world.

Then, last week, the Parable of the Weeds growing with the good. And the call to be patient and not to be the "instant weeder." One weed-whack a minute to "preserve" that only the best survive to the final harvest.

Recall that the work of evil (aka "weeds") occurs "right in the middle" of the faith community. In our world, in any world, in our lives in Christ it is true that evil coexists with good...you know that, I know that...the Church has known that through the century and work of the harvest, the final reckoning must be left to God. We heard about the need for patience and the truth that only God has charge of the final harvest and says "Keep on keeping on sowing, soak up the good news, even under opposition fruit will flourish. Trust me, I will take care of the bad stuff and at the end of time."

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches what one writer calls "The Little Seed Parables. The underlying sense of them is to contrast the "littleness" of the means and the "largeness" of the of the end. They are words of encouragement to the 12, those who gather, and for each of us who are part of the rest of the story. They are the framework of what I would call "Missional Direction."

The Wisdom of God --- Not unlike Solomon, we ask for direction...seek it in a variety of means...call them what you will...strategic plans, consultations, workshops...we seek direction. And the clear foundation for each of us and in our mission is to begin with the assurance that God's love is great and steadfast (nothing like it can be 'manufactured' or created by us) and that we are called to have an understanding mind (as in "ears to hear"), ability to discern between good and evil, truth and untruth."

Wisdom is not defined by our size, our worth, our pyramids of power, or skills at social networking. But, in our humility to keep on growing and to keep on serving until the ends of our days. And that can only be accomplished through...

God's Provision --- And that is where the parables of the kingdom begin to ground and sustain us for mission.

- Seed and Leaven. A mustard seed (so small) becomes a great tree. A bit of leaven (so little) makes large a whole loaf.

What we have seems minuscule, just a wee Gospel which becomes Jesus' way of making the church like a sheltering tree and a nourishing community for the whole world.

The good news of Jesus stands above and beyond any philosophy of life. Self-Help becomes helping others; grudge bearing becomes forgiving and reconciling; from small beginnings, great growth. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin once said: "Scripture's gospel is shallow enough for babies to wade in and never drown and yet deep enough for scholars to swim in and never touch the bottom." Keep on sowing!

- Then, grounded in the Gospel, "moved by joy," deep commitment follows...Here is the gem: that we follow Jesus with everything we have been given---time, talent, treasure, and voice! Treasure found, pearl of great value; it is never about what we give up, but the reason for doing so. Grace given in Christ demands counting the cost of discipleship! Someone once declared, Martin Luther, "Here I stand." Where do you stand, where do we stand and walk in following Christ where He leads us today?

Ready. Set. Grow --- This is where Jesus' mission is our MISSION in this place. Calling comes with a warning. To go or not to go is NOT the question; to grow and go is the outcome of seed sown on good ground that is a harvest of blessing today and at the end of our time.

The story of the need brings the word that judgment is left in the hands of God. It is likely that the fish in the net are meant to be disciples (guppies most likely, but a few sharks lurking about©).

Remember the soils? The weeds? To be in Christ is to seek deeper relationship into the wisdom of the Cross of Christ which draws us into the everlasting love and mercy of the God's who names and claims us forever.

In so many ways, I confess that I am all four soils of the parable with some days a lot better than others when being Christ-Like; I am the one who wants to weed out those who do not live up to my standards, my points of view, my direction. Yet, I know that when time concludes, when the "roll is called up yonder," I will be signed, sealed and delivered through the death of Christ, His life, His promise which makes me, which makes of us, a community lost in love that we might be love towards others each and every day. For we are, the household of God, and we are "convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In these summer days, may much sowing occur in the life of this faith community. Let us continue to remember the joy of sowing the Word of God, in our witness and in marking each moment as a Spirit led time to be about the mission of building the Church. And when we pray "Your kingdom come," may seek the will of God for each of our days and be the answer to that prayer:

- That the Gospel may be understood;
- That the love of Christ may be lived out;
- That the hope of all might be renewed;
- That mission might be bought up and taken seriously as we walk as children of the Light.

Tool Belts donned; on your mark---Ready. Set. Grow! In Jesus' name, let it be, Amen!