



Sunday 26th July 2020

7th Sunday after Trinity

**The Beacon Parishes Mission Community of Ipplepen with Torbryan,
Denbury, Broadhempston and Woodland**

FIRST READING

Genesis 29.15-28

Jacob Marries Laban's Daughters

Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, 'I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.' Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.' So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.' So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?' Laban said, 'This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.' Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

PSALM

Psalms 105.1-11, 45b

God's Faithfulness to Israel

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered,
O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the LORD our God;
his judgements are in all the earth.
He is mindful of his covenant for ever,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance.'

that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the LORD!

SECOND READING

Romans 8.26-End

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God's Love in Christ Jesus

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

GOSPEL

Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

The Parable of the Yeast

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Three Parables

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Treasures New and Old

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Reflection on the Gospel Reading by Reverend Anne Burden

The Gospel Reading today consists of a list of little parables - vivid pictures which feed straight into our imagination - even though the subjects probably mean more to those who first heard Jesus's teaching than they do to us today. Except perhaps ... the yeast. I'm probably not the only one who has re-discovered bread making during lockdown. Most of the time I've used a bread maker - and it's cost me a bit because I had to buy a new one after my old one - not used for at least 10 years - finally decided that it was dead. The results have been pretty good most of the time - and it's quite exciting to smell the delicious aroma of baking bread and to discover what the loaf is going to look like this time.

Now in case any of you are thinking of saying "me too" - and telling your own bread-making stories - please don't - at least not at this particular moment. Because the parables in our reading have nothing to do with bread or mustard seeds, with treasure or pearls or fish. They are all to do with the Kingdom of God - or the Kingdom of Heaven to use the expression favoured by Matthew, our Gospel writer for today.

If we get too caught up in the images in the parables, and think about their literal meaning, we can easily forget that they all begin "The kingdom of heaven is like" That's the important sentence, and the thing that binds together this odd assortment of images.

So what is the kingdom of heaven and what is it like?

The simplest answer is that it's where God is in charge - where God lives and reigns and has his being. Our faith teaches us that the kingdom of heaven is both beyond this world - our ultimate home with God in heaven, if you like - but also here and now, in us and around us. We pray in the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" - so this means that we're praying for the coming of the time when we are with God present in our human lives today. Millions of people pray this so often. The trouble is - when we look at the world - full of greed and selfishness, cruelty and abuse of power, tragedy and loss, illness and despair - it's easy to think the kingdom of heaven is obviously not here around us - we'd better look elsewhere, or actually it might be easier not to bother.

This is where these parables might help - the ones in our reading or the parables which might be emerging from our difficult coronavirus times. You'll need to have a think about that one. Having been forced to lay aside the many things we've used to fill (overfill?) our lives - most of us have been able to use the space to notice the little things - the sights and sounds of nature, the unexpected socially distanced greetings bringing joy, the little acts of kindness and generosity. They are probably no bigger than a mustard seed or a few grains of yeast - but when they are planted and nourished - they grow, and grow, and grow. Tiny beginnings can produce huge results.

Another thing is that we can have a better view of the treasures around us when our life has been pared down of what we thought was essential - treasures that are buried but which need to be searched for and acknowledged for what they are. They may not be pots of gold or pearls of great price - but gifts and talents which have already been given to us and to those around us - things which need to be discovered and appreciated and encouraged.

Yes, we still live in a muddled and sinful world - where bad things have been allowed to remain and grow alongside the good. We still need to sort out the good fish from the bad so that we can make wise decisions about how we live our lives. We don't need to make great judgements about people - we never know the whole story, and judgement is God's job not ours. He will bring all this together at the end of time - in his own time. But meanwhile, we can learn from and live with the message of the parables. Plant and nurture little things until they grow beyond our wildest dreams - and search for treasure in ourselves, in others and in the world - so that good will always be stronger than evil, and God's kingdom will establish itself and grow - on earth as it is in heaven.