

**LECTIONARY 17 (6 PENT.) JULY 24, 2011 CYCLE "A"**

**TITLE: WHAT DOES IT COST TO POSSESS THE KINGDOM?**

**READINGS: 1Kings 3:5-12, Ps 119:129-136,  
Rom. 8:26-39, Matt. 13:31-33,44-52**

On the church page of a small town paper the local churches had displayed their worship times and sermon topics. The Methodist church invited people to come to hear the sermon entitled "The Lord Is Among Us." On the same page was the Presbyterian's ad with the sermon title: "Where Is The Lord?" That's easy; He's at the Methodist church.

In today's readings we are assured that we will find the Lord if we seek the Kingdom of God. Our readings from 1Kings, the Psalm and our Gospel pericope all focus on the Kingdom of God as the supreme value for which no sacrifice is too great. Our ancestors in the faith felt that if you sought God's kingdom you were a wise person and the greatest example of a wise man to the ancients was Solomon. In our reading from 1Kings, Solomon does not ask for riches or length of days but for wisdom, which God grants him. This great gift given to Solomon by God is manifest in 1Kings chapter 3 to 11. We see Solomon as the wise practical Psychologist when he was given the dilemma of two women claiming the same baby in chapter 3:16-28. We see him as an administrator in chapter 4 as a builder in chapters 5-7 and as a merchant in chapter 9. This is the great Solomon, God's king of wisdom.

Once I was teaching Sunday school and I asked a 10-year-old little girl, "Could you tell the class why you think Solomon happened to be so wise?" She thought for a minute, opened her bright little eyes very wide and confidently said, "Because he had so many wives to help him."

Our Psalm today as well as our first reading tells us that it is the wise person who knows and keeps the commandments of Yahweh. "Truly I love your commandments more than gold." Our Psalm says, "Truly I direct my steps by all your precepts; I hate every false way. Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple." Ps.119:127-130.

As our Psalm tells us, the unfolding of your words, O Lord, gives light. We are enlightened with the wisdom of God by his Word, as was Solomon, which leads us to seek the Kingdom as Jesus directs us. Both our first reading and Psalm 119 focus on our Gospel message: the kingdom of God is the supreme value to be preferred above all else. As Jesus points out to us the person in our Gospel parable who found the treasure was willing to deceive others by first hiding the treasure so that he could acquire the whole field to make sure he possessed it. The Kingdom of God to which we, thank God, belong, is of such great value that the most drastic action is worth taking to gain it. And Jesus teaches us again in his parable today of the pearl of great value, that the person who found it is willing to sell everything he owns just to be able to have it.

Can you think of anything in this world for which you would sell everything you own? I can think of only one thing: the life of someone we truly love. If one of our children was sick and there was a cure that would cost everything we have, even including our own life, most of us would be willing to give it all up without a moment's thought. I'm convinced that we would give everything we own for the well-being of those we love. Nothing else that I can think of has that big of a hold on us. Yet Jesus said the Kingdom of heaven is worth everything we have, our money, our time, our energy, everything. So just what does it cost you and me to possess the Kingdom. We must ask ourselves what is it worth to me.

In this section of Matthew's Gospel Jesus gives us five different examples of how important it is to possess the Kingdom of heaven. 1)The mustard seed.(13:31) 2)Yeast a woman mixed into three measures of flour.(13:33) 3)A treasure hidden in a field(13:44) 4)A merchant in search of fine pearls (13:45) and 5)A net thrown into the sea (13:47). It sounds like entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is something we can purchase. If not with money than at least with good works. But we know that central to our faith belief is that Christ already paid it. We can't buy eternal life. It is the gift of a gracious God.

But Jesus isn't talking about heaven after we die anyway. He is speaking of the Kingdom of God in this world. Isaiah spoke of this Kingdom long ago when he said, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." Isa.2:4. And again, "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Isa.11:6. The great prophet was speaking of the kingdom that was coming to

this world. Jesus surely must have been remembering these words of Isaiah as he spoke of the Kingdom that was coming to this world into the hearts of humankind in the hearts of you and me. There will come a time when God shall reign in every heart. This is the Kingdom that Christ was heralding. It is a Kingdom of this world as well as the world to come.

For over fifty-five years the bells of the churches in Czechoslovakia stood silent. The communist government forbade evangelism. No bells were rung. Only silence from the churches. No overt witnessing, only conformity to the communist line. Then something unexpected happened. November 1989. News came from Berlin that the wall dividing that city was being decimated. Soviet oppression was ending. A pastor in Prague, a Reverend Schneeberger, began ringing the church bell of his parish. The joyous sound of church bells began to toll throughout the somber city of Prague. Rev. Schneeberger then erected outside his church the first evangelical message in forty-five years. It read: "The Lamb Wins!"

"The Lamb Wins!" One day a banner will fly over all this world. "The Lamb Wins!" That's the kind of Kingdom Jesus was proclaiming. There will come a time when God's Kingdom will reign in every heart. There will come a time when all people will live in peace and harmony together. This is God's plan and purpose for God's world. It is where the kingdoms of this world are destined. We have a very important part to play in that Kingdom. To possess that treasure, that pearl of great price, we must give everything we have, our entire selves, to the Lord. **Amen.**

**Pastor Barney**