



Trinity 7. Sunday, July 26th. 2020

1 Kings 3, 5-12, Psalm 119, 129-136, Matthew 13, 31-33, 44-52

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A number of years ago, a lady from Castleford in West Yorkshire won a large amount of money on the football pools. This changed her life, and she moved to Garforth, a smart area of Leeds. But the money and all that she was now able to spend didn't bring her happiness, because she missed all her friends, who couldn't afford the lifestyle, which she now had. She became the subject of the musical "Spend, spend, spend."

This raises the question of what is important in life and what our priorities are.

In today's first reading, Solomon goes to Gibeon, an important shrine, where he has a dream, a story told to account for the wisdom attributed to Solomon. In answer to the question of what God should give him, Solomon chooses wisdom, an understanding mind, to be able to distinguish good from evil; this, because he is to govern God's people.

If we are in a leadership role, having a lot of money or power won't help. What we need is wisdom, to be able to understand how people behave and what their needs and concerns are, to be able to make wise decisions and to distinguish between what is the right thing to do and what is not, and to know how to handle difficult situations.

Underlying this is the law of God, which often takes us in a different direction from that which we are tempted to follow.

Psalm 119 sees obedience to God's law as producing wisdom. Following the law of love and respect for others is likely to make us wise. Obedience, however, requires wisdom, and understanding is seen as a gift of God. So, the writer says:

'Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore, my soul keeps them.

The opening of your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

I open my mouth and draw in my breath, as I long for your commandments.'

A similar idea can be seen in Psalm 40:

'In the scroll of the book it is written of me that I should do your will, O my God; I delight to do it: your law is within my heart.'

The Gospel contains a number of parables about the Kingdom of God, which is seen as something very precious.

The first two parables about the mustard seed and the yeast begin with something small, which produces extraordinary results. They begin with something hidden. The mustard seed, growing into a huge tree is like the one described by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel, which shelters all the birds. The yeast is added to three measures of flour, the same amount, which Sarah in Genesis uses to provide for the three heavenly visitors, and it produces a lot of bread.

If you plant seeds, they germinate and produce large plants. If you put a bit of baking powder into a mixture, it is hidden, but it rises and has a huge effect, even if you use only a little amount. If you put a little fertiliser on rose bushes, they grow superbly and produce beautiful flowers. It is hidden in the soil.

These stories point to the almost unnoticed beginnings in the ministry of Jesus as contrasted with the great results which are promised. The disciples are transformed from people with little experience and understanding into confident apostles, through whom the life and teaching of Jesus was spread all over the world.

The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl point to the importance of sharing in the kingdom of God, in comparison with which every other value should be sacrificed. So, Solomon chooses wisdom rather than riches or power. The way of God is precious; it is a matter of priorities.

The parable of the net shows how the good and the bad will be separated at the last judgement. There is a suggestion that some will not accept the way of God. So, in Psalm 119 the psalmist asks: 'Order my steps by your word, and let no wickedness have dominion over me.'

The last parable, that of the householder, shows how Matthew, a scribe, sees his job as showing from the law and the prophets how Jesus is the hope of Israel, and the one through whom God is establishing his kingdom of love.

The kingdom is a gift of God, a way of living, into which we are given an opportunity to enter with total commitment. It is something like Solomon's wisdom, God's gift of knowledge, which feeds and protects us all.

There is a beautiful Taizé chant, which says this:
The kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.
Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.

So, God is working in each of us and, like the psalmist in Psalm 119, we need to focus, so that we can blossom. Over the last few months, there have been many small and sometimes unnoticed acts of kindness and selfless service. The results have been enormous. We have seen the great dedication of key workers in many areas, but also individuals seeing need and serving other people by shopping for them, collecting medication, and in many other ways. This is where the kingdom of God can grow and flourish. Being obedient to God and serving others has to be our priority. The results will be greater than we can imagine. It will be a pearl beyond price.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.