

26 July 2020

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 3:5,7-12; Matthew 13: 44-46

I've becoming a maple syrup snob over the years. I'm just not interested in putting anything other than real maple syrup on my French toast or pancakes. Artificial maple syrup is a gross and deficient imitation.

St. Paul says in prose what Jesus says in his parables today. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells them of his conversion to Christ. He speaks of his accomplishments as a righteous man up to the point of meeting the Risen Christ, and then says, "I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ." Like we might say, "All my bowling trophies, my diplomas, my employee of the year certificate—all these things that used to make me feel good about myself—mean nothing to me now that Jesus is at the center of my life."

Yes, I just compared real maple syrup to a living relationship with Jesus. Though, to extend my example with St. Paul, I support we could add maple syrup to the list of things that amount to nothing compared to the good of knowing Jesus.

But **what is it, this treasure?** What does it mean to be joyful about the Kingdom? It's an EXCITEMENT. An Excitement about the person of Christ, his sweet and powerful mercy, and the desire to move our egos aside and let Jesus lead our lives. Also, an excitement about living together in communion with others and living it out in service to one another. The Kingdom of God is about living out God's values in the world.

John Lewis titled his autobiography "Walking with the Wind." The title comes from a story he tells of being a boy playing outside in rural Georgia with his friends when a big storm, tornado-quality came up. His aunt was in the house, the type of house called a shotgun house, because you could shoot a shotgun through the front door and all the shot would go through that entrance and go out the back entrance. They were bare-bone houses. So, when this storm came up and the rains started and the wind was howling, his aunt called all fifteen or so children into the house. The storm increased to the point that that they could feel one corner of the house go up off the ground. His aunt said, "Come on children, let's all go stand over there in that corner to keep the house down!" And then another corner they would feel lifted, and **all sixteen of them would go to that corner to keep the house from blowing away.** It was a turning point for him, **a lesson he would remember: If many hands and bodies go to the weakest and most vulnerable part of a house or parts of our society and stand there, we will keep the house from blowing away.**

Last thing. **Parables are open to interpretation.** I just made one. In prayer with staff this week, **Beth made another one** that sort of went in one ear and out the other at the time, but thankfully I took notes. She said, "**What if the one who finds, sells and buys the field or pearl is meant to be Jesus? Jesus considers us a great treasure or pearl of great price and gives everything he has, including his very life, to possess us?**" You might resist that sense of being possessed by another, or you might feel unworthy and find it ridiculous that Jesus would think so highly of you. Or, and this would be better, you could get excited by the idea of Jesus actually seeking after you...wanting you and seeing you as a treasure. It could change your life.

I heard a **story once of a middle school teacher** who had a mix of students, one of which was the model student, call him Tom, and another who goofed around all the time, got in trouble a lot and received poor grades. We'll call that one Landon. One week, the teacher wrote a glowing report card with several comments to Tom's parents about how awesome he was, and wrote a quite different letter to Landon's parents. Well, they got switched, with the wrong names put on the report cards and envelopes. Landon's parents were surprised and a little confused but very pleased to read that their son had suddenly become, as the letter said, "such a joy to be around, respectful of others and always so careful in his work." They shared those comments with their son and he, well, he was changed by that letter. He was surprised but he returned to school wanting to live up to what that letter said. He was a new creation.

We're the weak ones whom Jesus treasures and for whom he sells everything so he can stand with us and raise us up.