

A 16th Sunday 2014

First Reading: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 (*Those who are just must be kind*)

Responsorial Psalm 86 "Lord, you are good and forgiving"

Second Reading: Romans 8:26-27 (*The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness*)

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-43 (*Images of the Kingdom of Heaven*)

♪♪ **Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness**

And all these things will be added unto you, alle-lu, alleluia. ♪♪

The Scriptures today call us to seek the Kingdom of God.

What does this kingdom that we are seeking look like?

Three parables in the Gospel give us images of the Kingdom of God - like cell phone videos.

In the first one we see that it has weeds & wheat, like our gardens and our communities, and even our hearts. In this parable, Jesus reveals the God described in the first reading from the book of Wisdom: "*There is no God besides you who have the care of all ... you judge with clemency and with much lenience you govern us ... those who are just must be kind; and you give your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.*"

In the Responsorial Psalm, we sang about this God in the beautiful response, "Lord, you are good and forgiving." Both passages from the Hebrew Scriptures give us a picture of the kind of righteousness that God exercises.

However, unlike the Lord, we are often tempted to blame and sit in judgment. We like to sit in God's chair, the judge's chair which the Father has given to Christ. And we usually do not judge with mercy, the way God judges. In order to seek the reign of God, to really mean it when we pray "Thy kingdom come," I need to get out of God's chair and let Jesus be my judge, and the judge for everyone else as well.

I often give a penance in the sacrament of Reconciliation that goes like this:

"Repeat these phrases for about 5 minutes: 'Jesus be my judge, Jesus be their judge.'

And sometimes I need to change my judgment about the circumstances of my life. As Richard Rohr has said, often I need to forgive what is! When, by the grace of God, I can do that, situations that seem like disaster can become new opportunities for growth in wisdom and justice and mercy.

In 2011, when Hurricane Irene flooded the doublewide trailer I had been renting since 1995, I thought it was a disaster. But God blessed me and Bethany Ministries in so many ways, I was able to eventually accept and even celebrate what had happened. It connected us with the others who had suffered loss and blessed the whole community with a new energy and hope. However, I had been living in temporary residences since that day. I called it "camping" and I was expecting to move back into a renovated house.

In early 2014, after two and a half years, I realized that the house was not going to be ready to live in soon, if ever, and I heard God calling me to find another place. In less than 24 hours, Sr. Anna was told by her landlord that an apartment in her building was open and did she know anyone looking for a place to live? I moved in to that apartment in early February of this year. Many of the people who had also endured Irene helped to move donated furniture into my new place. Some furniture & appliances that did not fit into the new apartment went to others who could use it. It was not the future I had expected, but it was even better than I could have imagined.

The 2nd parable- the story of the mustard seed - tells us that the Kingdom is not so easy to recognize from outward appearances. The people of Israel expected the Messiah to overthrow the Romans. The image they would have expected in this parable would be a cedar of Lebanon, rather than a bush, even a large one. The reign of God is not always what we expect. It starts very small - often with a few people. The Catholic community I grew up in does not look exactly like the one that exists today - either in the parish I grew up in, or in the world. It has changed, and evolved because it kept growing.

This parish - like many others - has a new name, and has brought different people together. The church is not the same as the kingdom of God, but it is called to reflect and build that kingdom. I believe church is more than a building, or an institution, or even a gathering of Catholics. It is more of a verb than a noun- it's what happens when we live the Gospel - when people come together in faith to pray and care for each other and for the earth no matter what the size of the group or the building they worship in. It is then that we are a mustard seed that can grow into much more.

In the third parable we see a woman kneading yeast into a batch of dough - enough for a big party. Like yeast, the kingdom is hidden all through the dough. It changes everything. In this story, which is parallel to the other two, a woman is an image of God. The woman who puts yeast into her three measures of flour is an image of God's action. Leaven, in the Scripture, is often a symbol of corruption, like a virus that infects a person or a community.

Jesus would have shocked his listeners both by using a woman as an image of God and yeast as a symbol of good - a good infection that permeates the whole body with the Gospel.

Sometimes we think the Kingdom of God has to be visible or separate to be real, like religion only on Sunday, holiness only for priests and sisters or special people. But the parable says it is really secret, mixed up in daily life, like the Spirit in the reading from Romans. Jesus is saying that we all can be carriers of this infectious spirit on the job, in our families, or at school.

Jesus still speaks in parables, we are the new parables of Christ when we accept the sometimes painful process of spiritual growth.

You can survive any change, and be the beginning of a new planting of the mustard seed of God's kingdom - if you live in the spirit of Christ that Paul writes about in the 2nd reading: "*the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.*" And with the help of that same spirit, we can discern where God is leading us and what God is asking us to do in our day to day lives. And when we seek God's kingdom at every moment, we are already beginning to live in that kingdom - a reality that is described by St. Francis in his great canticle of Brother Sun.

♪ Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good. ♪