



07/26/2020 The Word and Us
1 Kings 3:5-12; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33.44-46

You may be familiar with the TV show, Antiques Roadshow. It is interesting to see the objects that people bring to have appraised and hear the story of how they have come in their possession: some are heirloom, some were found tucked away in their grandparents attic, some others were bought at a yard sale. When the appraiser begins to explain the historic relevance and the artistic importance of any given object, one knows something big is about to be revealed. The crescendo is built with every little piece of extra information and one's curiosity is prepped to hear about the estimated value of the object. After a few shows, the viewer is made part of the owner's satisfaction and delight and looks forward to seeing more of those surprised reactions. The overjoyed owner comes away with a more educated appreciation of the precious object in his or her possession.

In today's gospel, Matthew tries to capture and highlight that satisfaction and delight. By referring to psalm 78, the evangelist tells us what Jesus' intent is in using parables. The writer of the psalm invites the people of Israel to pay attention and hear anew the ancient sayings that reveal Reality beneath reality. The psalmist also gives people the mandate to pass on this experiential information to the next generations. Parables are not incomprehensible, Matthew seems to say, but are a way to stimulate people's intuition and creativity. In other words, those who want to hear will, and those who do not want to hear won't.

In the parables of the fine pearl and the treasure in the field, there is indication of personal involvement: there is some discernment to be done, a choice to be made, a renunciation of something for a greater good to be obtained.

There is some digging to be done in the story of the treasure in the field. We are not told how one knows about the hidden treasure. But anyhow, the work continues with the appreciation that what is found is ridiculously precious and the finder commits enthusiastic energy in hiding the treasure in anticipation of selling all that she owns to buy the field.

The story of the pearl merchant is slightly different. In fact, the merchant is already knowledgeable of the high value of pearls and sets out to intentionally scout the world for good ones. Once his eyes fall on this one extremely valuable pearl, he goes off to sell all that he owns only to return and purchase the pearl. The ending of both parables indicate the perceptive wisdom of both persons in understanding that what they have so far is nothing compared to what they have found. What they have can and must be easily given up in order to acquire the new finding. Time cannot be wasted and attachment to older possessions must not be an issue.

But what can be said about the treasure and the pearl themselves? What urgency of soul search can they represent and require? Even though this is a process common to all believers, I can't but speak for myself as I look and ponder what is my most dear



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treasure and valuable rare pearl: God's holy Word as expressed in the Scriptures and incarnated in Jesus.

I stumbled across the Word of God as a youth. The alien language became soon personal, direct, and descriptive of my encounter and interactions with God. It was fascinating to discover how God was seeking me out, pursuing me and not letting me go. God wanted an intimate relationship with me, forgiving my past sin and cajoling me in my resistance and hesitation. God draws me constantly into God's Reality and invites me to embrace and live by the values of God's kingdom.

Through the years, through the study of the Bible, through prayer and meditation, through holy conversations, and through the observation of my core beliefs, attitudes, and behavior I have come to realize that being a follower of Christ is not always easy nor is it always pleasant. There is nothing pleasant about picking up your cross to follow Jesus; nothing pleasant with dying to self to be born anew in him. And the dying needs to happen daily if I want to remain true to my baptism. It takes much trust to be convinced that the hardship of the present moment cannot compare with the present joy and the blessings in store for us.¹

I have experienced the Word of God to be shelter and a place of rest, like the many birds finding shelter in the mustard shrub, just as I have noticed how it necessarily needs to be worked in me as the yeast in the dough. The "work" that needs to happen in all the disciples of Jesus is the wise training of the heart and the enduring resolution of the mind; it is the clear commitment to always choose to serve God; the desire to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.²

It is in the study of the Word of God, the wrestling with that Word in meditation, and the lifting up in prayer of all who are struggling and seek a better and just world, that our souls are shaped and our minds are sharpened. If I do not carry to the altar the cry of the poor and my personal sacrificial love offering, not just my money but my entire life, what am I carrying?

When we abide by the Word and embody it, God transforms us from the inside out, and Christ in us takes over in an ongoing process that requires constant vigilance and submission.³ God is absolutely always at work to turn awful things around in our favor. But please, understand: it is not that the ugliness of our experience (Covid19, social unrest, marital problems, hunger, unemployment, and the likes) disappears; God empowers us to use whatever we are facing to grow in understanding and renewed commitment to love God and neighbor.

¹ Romans 8:18; James 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:6

² Joshua 24:15; Micah 6:8

³ Galatians 2:20



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When I lift up in prayer those who are suffering and ask God to do something about it, God turns it around and asks me: “What are *you* doing about it?” That’s when I feel lost and powerless. But that’s also when God challenges me to turn my mourning into action; that’s when I need to educate myself about whatever is keeping my neighbor down; that’s when I need to find an outlet and use my skills to serve others. My passion for the afflicted can become a tool of solidarity in god’s hand to make a difference in the world.

Let us begin by acknowledging, with the words of St. Paul, that “we do not know how to pray” and need the assistance of the Spirit. Next, let us check if our prayer is a monologue where we present a wish list to our Lord with the expectation to be satisfied. Nothing wrong with the wish list as long as we conclude it with Jesus’ words, “Not my will but yours be done.” And finally, let us linger a little longer with God in silence, inviting God with the words of the prophet: “Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.”⁴

May the Spirit of wisdom assist us and accompany us in difficult times and may the light of Christ be the lamp to our feet. Amen.

⁴ Romans 8:26-39; Luke 22:42; 1 Samuel 3:10