

Ninth Sunday of Pentecost, Proper 10 July 13 2008 Year "A"
Genesis 25:19-34; Psalm 119:105-112, Romans 8:1-11, Matthew 13:1-9,18-23
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Let anyone with ears listen!

The gospel story we just heard read is one of those that most of us remember rather well. It is a simple story and even for those with no agricultural experience, it is easy to imagine the farmer walking along the field throwing the seeds from his basket to his left and right. The slightest breeze would be enough to send some seeds off course and out to the path where, as Jesus described it, some fell on the path and the birds came and picked them up; others fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil and they were scorched by the sun; others fell among thorns and were choked by them and others fell on good soil and yielded thirty, sixty and even a hundredfold.

Unfortunately what is left out in this morning's reading is this: the apostles asked Jesus why he spoke in parables and he explained that those to whom he spoke were not unlike those in the time of Isaiah who said, *This people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes so that they might not look with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn - and I would heal them.*" The next two sentences are interesting in that Jesus compliments the apostles for not being like these people and then, just in case they really don't understand the parable either, he explains it to them.

In my formative years I learned the gospel stories by heart. In grade school I was one of three students who knew these stories and how they slightly differed from one gospel to another. But no one told me that caring for other people was a Christian principle. I was encouraged by my mother to bring kindling to an elderly neighbor. I was also aware that my mother

wrote off debts of those customers who could not pay their bills so that the family would not go without food. In high School a classmate encouraged me to join a program that had us visiting patients in the nearby hospital each week. In seminary another classmate got me involved in youth work, kids and adults on the streets and all that went with it; and bringing soup to those who were homeless.

It never crossed my mind that I was doing this as part of my baptismal covenant. It never dawned on me that I was doing this work because I was a Christian or, as we'd say back home in Ireland, " a good catholic."

My social concern crashed around me one night when studying the bible I realized that not everything in the Bible was actually written by the hand of God. For six weeks I lived in something of a dark fog not knowing why I was in the seminary or attending church. With the assistance of one of the scripture professors I came to realize that it was the God of my childhood that died and now I had to reread the scriptures through the eyes of an adult and a new understanding.

It took a while but finally a dim light began to shine, then slightly brighter. Then periodically I would have this wonderful epiphany that made me want to jump with joy. There were times that I read the scriptures like a kid in a candy shop.

Attitudes change slowly. Ideas embedded in childhood can be difficult to let go of. It would be a few years before I could feel the excitement that the apostles spoke of on the road to Emmaus *Were not our hearts burning in within us as he opened the scriptures to us.*

I can only imagine what it must have been like for those two as Jesus took the bread, broke and shared it with them. As the lights began to go on in their head, the images of Jesus forgiving, loving, being compassionate, touching lepers, began to make sense as they tied these images to the Scriptures they knew so well. The words, *Do this in memory of me* relocated from the Cross of Friday back to his daily *living* the Good News – making *the kingdom of God is within you*, a living reality.

Peter did not get the message all at one. Peter had a difficult time believing that Paul was an apostle and never called him that. Peter went on to say that everyone was equal and yet he would not eat anything but kosher foods until he was first confronted by Paul and then given a dream from God to see that everything created by God is clean. Peter maintained that everyone had to become a Jew first, meaning that the males had to be circumcised, but Paul stood up to him and he finally saw the light.

It is fascinating when we think we are so certain that our ways are the right ones only to finally open our eyes and realize that there is a different point of view that may have equal or more value. It is never easy to say, "I need to change my mind" and open our hearts to a new way of thinking, a new way of being Christian.

One can only wonder if Jesus had to leave Nazareth and relocate to Capernaum because the attitudes in Nazareth were such that the people would not listen to his ways of understanding scripture. The people of Capernaum were so far down the social ladder they were thrilled that

someone cared for them and cared enough to live among them and give them hope.

There is something about walking on an empty beach looking at “the lonely sea and the sky” that helps us come to grips with how small we are in the great cosmos around us. There is something about the beach, even on a lake, that lets us know there is a force out there to be reckoned with that is greater than ourselves. There is something about water that reminds us of our limitations when it can evaporate so quickly. Reading the Gospels we realize how much the land and the sea played a role in shaping the stories for Jesus.

Being mindful of where he walked Jesus was able to experience the scriptures he loved so well come alive within him. Being mindful of the world around him as belonging to God whom he called Abba, he was able to make the scriptures come alive in the simple stories of everyday life and turn them into life-giving messages. He used the images of fishing and farming to clarify his points about the Good News and how the Good News of the Kingdom of God is alive within us. Initially, it would seem, the apostles were too close to the sea to understand the depth of his message. For them the sea was where you fished for food for the body for a meal for a day.

Jesus taught them how to fish for people and be fed for a lifetime. No wonder they were excited as they remembered his words and his actions. No wonder they wanted to go out and spread the Good News to the ends of the earth. As the Good New took deeper root within them it give them new life and a new challenge to be more and to make God become a living entity within us rather than a Being in the sky of which to be afraid.

What Jesus said about hearing the word of God and it growing some thirty, some sixty and some one hundredfold is not unlike what St Augustine said in the fifth century when it became clear to him that we are not born Christians but we *become* Christian.

We hear the word of God and we let other things become of greater importance. Then we hear the word of God and, for a variety of reasons, we we're not ready to hear it in its purity but neither are we completely deaf to it. Finally we hear the word of God and open our minds and hearts and rejoice in our new understanding as we come to grips with the implications for our own lives and the lives of those around us.

Hearing the word of God is about listening and responding. Hearing the word of God is about opening our minds to hear what God wants of us, not what we want from God. Hearing the word of God is about a metanoia, a change of heart in which we surrender to God and seek to do, as Jesus said, *the will of the one who sent me*. Hearing the word of God is about being attentive to God's voice spoken to us sometimes through the mouths of children or someone less educated or someone we do not wish to listen to.

Hearing the word of God is about being creative. God spoke; the world was created and God saw that it was good. God still speaks and there is still much being created on a daily basis if only we open our eyes and our minds to see and hear and rejoice in the creative presence of God in the world around us, within us and in one another.

I don't know what Barry Manlow had in mind when he wrote this song, but in preparing this sermon it kept coming back to me and I think I know why. Here is Manlow's song:

I've been alive forever, and I wrote the very first song.
I put the words and the melodies together,
I am music, and I write the songs.

I write the songs that make the whole world sing.
I write the songs of love and special things.
I write the songs that make the young girls cry.
I write the songs, I write the songs.

My home lies deep within you,
and I've got my own place in your soul.
Now, when I look out through your eyes,
I'm young again, even though I'm very old.

I write the songs that make the whole world sing.
I write the songs of love and special things.
I write the songs that make the young girls cry.
I write the songs, I write the songs.

Oh my music makes you dance
and gives your spirit to take a chance,
and I wrote some rock 'n' roll so you can move.
Music fills your heart, well, that's a real fine place to start.

It's from me, it's for you,
It's from you, it's from me,
it's a world wide symphony.

I write the songs that make the whole world sing.
I write the songs of love and special things.
I write the songs that make the young girls cry.
I write the songs, I write the songs.

Let us listen to God's Word singing in our heart.