

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

August 3, 2008

Lessons: Palm 145: 8-9, 15-22; Isaiah 55:1-5; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Over the years we have probably all heard many times of the value in pausing from time to time and taking stock of the life situation that we find ourselves in. And I would guess that when we have done this it has been valuable and actually quite interesting.

And this morning, on this, the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, I would like to suggest that we do this. We are at the beginning of August and we are about one third of the way through the season of Pentecost, the last and the longest season of the Church year. Let's pause, and look at how far we have come, and let's look at what lies ahead. And as we reflect on our journey, ask yourself: "What has been my experience so far?" "What has been my experience so far?"

As a starting point, let's begin with a quick glance at the Church year. But as we do so, try not to think of it as history. Think of it as your own personal journey of faith as one of Jesus' disciples today in 2008.

Think for a moment about how you began your journey at the end of November last year with the season of Advent. What was your experience, and what did you learn during that time of preparation for the coming of Jesus? Was your focus on Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, or did you perhaps begin to wonder about the concept of His coming again at the end of time, and what that might mean? What was your experience?

And as we traveled through the seasons of Christmas and then Epiphany, was your focus on the historical birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the visit of the Magi? Did you wonder what those experiences might have been like for Mary or Joseph or the shepherds, or did you apply those experiences to your own life and the lives of those you love. Did you wonder what decisions you might have made under similar circumstances and just perhaps, what decisions you would make now, if you were faced with those circumstances? What was your experience?

During the season of Lent we participated in the study "Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton." What specific lessons stood out for you? Do you still think about them? How have they helped to change your life? What was your experience?

As Lent came to a close, we entered Holy Week. Together we read aloud the story of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then his arrest and trial. Together we called out "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And then on Good Friday we traveled around this church to each of the Stations of the Cross, and we, with the words of the thief on the cross, sang "Jesus remember me, when you come into your kingdom." What stood out

for you, this year, 2008, as you relived these events? What did they say to your heart? What was your experience?

And when Holy Week and Easter Sunday were over this year, did your intensity tend to fade? When the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection has past, what is your response to the readings and lessons for the next several weeks? Are you able to put yourself into the stories of the risen Jesus appearing to his disciples? Are you able to ask, along with them, some important questions?

I ask all of this, because when you really think about it, each of these seasons forms a part of our journey of faith. A sort of platform. Not just from an historical standpoint, but as the journey of faith that we each travel today, the journey that we take together as Christ's disciples...right here... right now...each day of our lives. Think about that. Because this story is about to come a lot closer for each of us. Let's look at what happens next, and let's look at something that is critical to our journey of faith.

After appearing to them over a period of forty days, before his Ascension, Jesus told his disciples:

*“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

And shortly thereafter, on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus' disciples were given the promised gift...the gift of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were given the gift of the Holy Spirit and they became empowered to go into the world to serve. Just as Jesus had promised, the disciples were not left to go into the world on their own. They were not asked to do those things that he commanded them to do in their own power. And on this Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, it is important to remember, neither are we. The disciples received the power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and when we were each Baptized, someone laid their hands upon our heads and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit”. As disciples of Jesus today, we too have been given the power of the Holy Spirit to do what Jesus is calling us to do.

And so we come back to this morning, the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. Today we want to remember again that it is in this Season of Pentecost, when we really focus on how we live out our lives as Christians. We focus on how we live as Jesus' disciples today.

So now, look back at the last eleven weeks of your life. And as you look back, ask yourself: “What has been my experience so far?” “What has been my experience so far?” Have my life and my service to Christ reflected the power of the Holy Spirit? What has been your experience?

As we begin the next phase of our journey through Pentecost, remember what we heard in the Gospel lessons, both last week and today. These are important insights that can be

very helpful to us as we seek to be “Instruments of Peace”, as we seek to instruments in extending the Kingdom of God.

First, remember that what we do does not have to be some huge deed. Last week we were reminded that what we do may be as small as a mustard seed or as unassuming as a small amount of leaven in a large amount of flour. But that seed of love or compassion or joy or peace may very well grow into a very large tree in someone’s life. And that yeast of pardon or union or faith may work unseen until it produces a remarkable result.

As we heard in today’s Gospel, even though Jesus wanted to be alone with God after learning of John the Baptist’s death, when he saw the crowd that had come to seek him, and he saw their needs, he had compassion on them and healed them...and think about the story of the large crowd being fed. Jesus has compassion. People need to know that. And so must we.

Now, think about these examples. Think about Pentecost, think about your own baptism, think about being an “Instrument of Peace”...think about what you do and of mustard seeds and of yeast. Think of these things and listen to these words of Scottish Professor of New Testament, William Barclay. He writes:

*“This miracle informs us very clearly of the place of the disciple in the work of Christ. The story tells that Jesus gave the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowd. Jesus worked through the hands of his disciples that day, and he still does.*

*“Again and again we come face to face with this truth which is at the heart of the Church.... If Jesus wants something done, if he wants a child taught or a person helped, he has to get a man (or a woman) to do it. He needs people through whom he can act, and through whom he can speak...*

*“...Jesus Christ needs disciples through whom he can work and through whom his truth and his love can enter into the lives others. He needs men (and women) to whom he can give, in order that they may give to others. Without such men (and women) he cannot get things done and it is our task to be such men (and women) for him*

*“It would be easy to be daunted and discourage by a task of such magnitude. But there is another thing in this story that may lift up our hearts. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd, they told him that all they had was five loaves and two fishes; and yet with what they brought to him, Jesus wrought his miracle. Jesus sets every one of us the tremendous task of communicating himself to men (and women); but he does not demand from us splendours and magnificences that we do not possess. He says to us, ‘Come to me as you are, however ill-equipped; bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service.’ Little is always much in the hands of Christ.”*

As we continue our journey through this season of Pentecost, as we truly seek to be Jesus’ disciples in our world today, remember your baptism and remember the Holy Spirit that is already within you. And then pray to be shown where you can continue to

be “Instruments of Peace”. Pray to be shown where you could plant one small mustard seed. Pray to be shown where you could mix one small amount of leaven.

AMEN