

Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year A, Proper 12: Romans 8:26–34; Psalm 119:129–136;*

*Matthew 13:44–52\**

Today’s gospel lesson is the conclusion of Jesus’ Sermon in Parables.<sup>1</sup> He has been teaching from a boat to crowds gathered by the sea. After telling the parable of the wheat and the weeds—the end of last week’s lesson, Jesus goes ashore and into a house. His disciples follow him and ask him to explain the parable of the weeds and wheat. The problem at this point in the narrative is that some believe and persist in their belief, and others do not believe and continue in their unbelief. This is the Jewish Christian community’s situation for which the evangelist history came to call Matthew writes.

In the house, Jesus explains the parable and makes it clear that he was speaking of God’s judgment at the close of the age: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>2</sup> That’s where the lesson left us last Sunday. Jesus is still in the house, and his disciples are with him. The sermon continues with the parable of the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:1–52.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:43.

hidden treasure and the parable of a merchant seeking fine pearls.

For my part, it's not easy to accept that it's okay to cheat an owner out of his property even if the owner does not know what he has. Daniel Harrington writes, "The emphasis of this parable . . . is on the great value of what is found . . . and the single-minded response [the kingdom] should elicit."<sup>3</sup> The disciples do not ask for Jesus to explain these parables or the parable of the dragnet.

In the *Acts of Peter*, a Greek text from the last half of the second century,<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ is the treasure and the pearl.<sup>5</sup> For Matthew's community, the lost field represents the Jews who did not value the treasure that they had been given. The renunciation of possessions is a strong theme in Matthew but will not become normative for the Christian community in the generations to come.<sup>6</sup> In explaining the parable of the sower to his disciples, Jesus said, "As for what was

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 207.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Peter, Acts of St," 1068–69.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 279 n.45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 279 n.44.

sown among thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”<sup>7</sup>

As I worked with these parables, I found myself thinking of two parables that Jesus will tell when he reaches Jerusalem, the parable of the vineyard and the parable of the wedding feast. In the first, the owner sends servants and finally, his son, whom his tenants kill.<sup>8</sup> The owner will punish his tenants with death. In the second, a man not dressed for a wedding is discovered and “cast into the outer darkness.”<sup>9</sup> The Son of Man will come at an hour we do not expect.”

The wording of the collect appointed for two Sundays ago—Proper 10—I’ve disliked for many years. It begins, “O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do.”<sup>10</sup> I wish it read, “mercifully receive our prayers and grant that we may know and understand what we ought to do.” I don’t like collects that read as if the

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 13:22.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 21:33–46.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 22:44b.

<sup>10</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* [1979], 231.

minister is not a member of the gathered congregation.

I'm sure that some people in this time of hardship are looking for ways to profit from others' hardships and that some people who are mostly unaffected by disease or economic challenges are not reaching out to those in need. Our Clothing Ministry team has been meeting to think about ways to serve those in need of clothing safely. We don't want people who are in risk categories or emotionally uncomfortable to be burdened further at this time. We pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our minds and our hearts.

At some point, we will want to think about how we can open our building to support groups who may not want to live in the world of Zoom. Father Smith has been thinking about Christian Education, moving from Saint Benedict's Study to Saint Joseph's Hall. I suggested that the Clothing Ministry consider using Saint Joseph's Chapel and Our Lady of Mercy as a distribution center. The everyday life of our parish is going to be different for the foreseeable future. And if you haven't had a chance to read the newsletter for this Sunday, please go online and read it.

Back to the parables. Jesus doesn't mind answering his disciples' questions. He doesn't need us to get everything right. His last teaching on judgment, we will hear on the Feast of Christ the King. He wants to say to each of us when we stand before the King, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."<sup>11</sup>

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 25:35–36.