

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 12 – Year A – 7.26. 20 - The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony  
1 Kings 3:5-12, Psalm 119:129-136, Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Among the many things that have happened over the past several days, two have been cause for reflection. Some time ago, we erected a banner near the St. Augustine sign by the road. It had on it what has now become a familiar slogan. “Black Lives Matter.” A few days after it went up, someone took the banner down. It has disappeared. This is troubling on several fronts, but most important for me is the fact that it was anonymous thus precluding any conversation around the matter.

My first reaction, a bit of a knee jerk I admit, was to simply go out and get another banner and put it up. But when I thought it through, I realized that such action would probably set off a spiral, take it down, put up another, take it down, put up another. Such action doesn’t really address the issue, which in my mind can only be taken up by dialogue. Not slogans shouted but conversation engaged where differing points of view are heard and respected. So, I won’t be buying a sign.

The second thing that happened that has caused me to reflect was a letter received from someone who used shaming language to disagree with our having erected the banner and requesting that we remove it. The letter writer contended that the slogan “Black Lives Matter” is the slogan of an organization that he described as terrorist, supporting looting, rioting, physical violence, and hatred. I have no knowledge of an organization behind the slogan, perhaps there is, but no links or evidence was offered to support the statements made. No information was offered to support the allegations of looting, violence, hatred and all the rest. For me and I believe for most people the statement “black lives matter” is not a slogan in support of an organization but a statement of truth that underlies our Christian faith. Black lives do matter, as does all life, human life, animal life, plant and even planetary life. Life matters because God the creator is present in all of life. One of the important attributes of creativity, divine or human is the fact that a piece of the creator is retained in that which is created. A bit of God resides in each one of us. If God matters, then all of life matters as well. Beyond that, if God matters, then each life matters. All life is important to the Creator.

The action to remove the banner by person or persons unknown, and the accusations of the letter writer, are two ways to disagree. They are not, to my mind the best ways to deal with disagreement. Where ever we encounter people we are liable to encounter people who do not see the world as we do, whether those people are in our families, neighborhoods or in this congregation. To make accusations without support or to remove an object that offends you from another’s property, forecloses any worthwhile conversation. My mind will never be changed and I will never see your point of view through these two actions. All that is accomplished is irritation not a fruitful place for understanding or reconciliation.

The Hebrew scripture for today speaks of Solomon and his request of God. Solomon is remembered as a wise and careful ruler, a person who loved God and was faithful and successful. Solomon was all of those things, and yet Solomon also defied God’s law by marrying

an Egyptian princess. Solomon worshiped in the “high places” forbidden by the Torah and Solomon worshiped other gods, in direct violation of the Ten Commandments. Solomon was human, in other words, a mix of saint and sinner, just like us all. Solomon’s great strength and source of wisdom was the ability to ask the right question at the right time. It is the sort of wisdom that is useful when people disagree. The more wisdom, the more asking of the right question at the right time, the more we are likely to come to a place of reconciliation. Maybe not resolution, but reconciliation. We may never agree entirely but we can come to a place where we can see one another’s point of view and respect that point of view. Holding differing views with respect is what it means to live in a diverse society, to participate in a diverse congregation.

Jesus loved to teach in parables. Today’s gospel from Matthew gives us four very short and pithy parables. These short comparisons are designed to help us see things from another’s point of view. They all begin with the statement “The kingdom of heaven is like...”. Jesus spoke a great deal about the Kingdom of God. Kingdoms and kings were familiar to the people of his day. They told stories about King David and King Solomon and lived in Palestine, with a puppet king, Herod. I have not had personal experience living in a kingdom. When I hear the term Kingdom of God it gets entwined with all of my negative ideas about kingdoms and kings. I would prefer to speak of the community of God. Community has much more meaning for me. I live in a community, work in a community and worship with a community of human beings. The root of the word community from the Latin *communis*, meaning common as in the phrase we hear so often lately. “We are all in this together.” Human beings are the common denominator in the community of God.

In the four small parables that form the gospel today, Jesus was trying to describe the community of God in a way that the people would understand. The result of the description was not what those who listened expected, not what they believed or hoped the community of God would be like. The community of God was described first as a mustard seed that grows into a great bush. On the surface an apparently good thing. The community of faith will grow to a large and substantial entity. But, by asking the right questions at the right time we can come to understand this a bit differently. Mustard plants are weeds, big, vigorous weeds. Their seeds are tiny and often mixed in with the seed of whatever crop is being sown. What you get is a field with a mixed crop, some weed some grain. It is not perfect, rather it is the way most of us experience the world. Some good, some not quite what we intended. Or think of the person who discovers a treasure in a field not his own. Rather than tell the owner, he goes and sells all he has to buy the field and acquire the treasure, unethical or simply shrewd? Think of the merchant who discovers a pearl of great price, again sells everything and acquires the pearl. A person who loves beauty or a person who is unhealthily fixated on one object unable to engage with anything else. The community of God that Jesus was describing is very much a mixed community of human beings. Not life in heaven in the sweet by and by, but the life we have here and now.

The intriguing thing about parables is that they speak to each of us differently, to each of us as we need to hear. For me, what these parables are saying is that life is a mixed field. There are good seeds and those that are weeds. There are impulses of generosity and impulses of temptation. There is beauty and the urge to hold and not share what we have. We are all

part of that mixed field. The nature of wisdom is to ask the right questions of the right people at the right time and then be willing to listen to the answers. Having listened to the answers wisdom is being willing to share our own answers. Wisdom is coming to a place of reconciliation even in the midst of continued disagreement. All life matters and God is present in our listening and in our sharing.