

Scripture: 1 Kings 3:5-12 and Matthew 13:31-52

Preacher: Marion Thomas

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

As some of you know, I have spent the last two years going through a lengthy process of discerning what my call to ministry might be. This journey started with a prod from Chris and many people have supported me along the way. This culminated with a 2-day assessment a couple of weeks ago with a group of people known as the Bishops Advisory Panel. Their job was to discern whether my calling should lead to ordination or not, and that's probably the reason why the word discernment leapt out of the page at me when I was preparing to speak about Solomon.

Solomon was one of king David's sons who lived about 1,000 years before Christ. He famously finally provided the temple that enabled the ark of the covenant to have a building for its home rather than a tent it had lived in for the 480 years following the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Solomon's prayer asking to be able to discern good from bad found favour with God and Solomon's prayer was answered.

I've always felt that praying for wisdom and discernment is one of the most valuable things we can ask God for. Many years ago we used to use service booklets for our communion here that had red covers. In the back were several short prayers that could be used silently after we had taken communion. I was always particularly drawn to the Serenity Prayer which I'm sure is very familiar to many. The prayer goes like this. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." From that point on, I realised how important it is to ask God for wisdom, and also the grace to use that wisdom well, and in his service.

I also know that I need help and wisdom to understand certain passages of scripture that I am struggling with, and to discern what is actually being said. I am sure I am not alone in this. And sometimes Jesus deliberately chose to speak in parables that were somewhat confusing. So why did he do this? Well, a parable well can both explain things very clearly for some people, those who are ready to hear about God's plan, and at the same time can obscure those meanings for others. So for some people seeking Christ it will really open a door and for others

the parable will simply remain a pleasant story. You might remember Chris's sermon on the 5th of July when he was talking about the fact that Christ is there to be found, and he will be found by those who seek him. So Jesus is speaking in parables to those who seek him, and those who seek Him, will find him and will understand.

Today we heard five parables. The first two tell us that the expanse, the hugeness of the Kingdom of heaven, is beyond our capability to understand. The next two tell us of the great treasure for us in the Kingdom of heaven, and then the final one explains that the good will be separated from that which is not good.

The humble mustard seed is quite amazing. The seed referred to in this parable is not the mustard seed that we find on the shelves in Tesco, it is the seed of the arak tree, also known as the toothbrush tree. This tree can grow to over 20 feet high. It grows to enormous proportions compared with the tiny seed it started from. The kingdom of heaven is unimaginably expansive. It is perhaps unsurprising that our parish chose the mustard tree to be our logo. Julie Fox, Robert's wife drew a brilliant design that we can see on our News Sheet and on our website, parish magazine and on the new glass doors of The Link. We see both the seeds and the tree.

We heard,

"it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds come and perch in its branches." The tiny seed produces a tree so expansive that the birds can come and nest there.

The kingdom of heaven is so expansive, beyond what our imagination can think possible, and all the birds, all those who follow the Lord, will have a home there. This means not just the disciples, not just the Jews, but the Gentiles too. We all have a safe place to perch in the kingdom of heaven.

I just want to move on to the final part of the New Testament reading. Once Jesus has checked that the disciples understand he then makes the comment," *'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure, what is new and what is old.'*

Here Jesus uses the word 'scribe' to mean his disciples. They are being trained for the kingdom and will be able to draw out the meaning of the scriptures and teach others. We are all disciples of Christ. We can all share the good news of Christ.

I did wonder however about what is meant by 'new and old'. I'll be honest that I don't know what the correct answer is but I would like to think that Jesus is

referring to the new treasure we have from his ministry, what will become the New Testament, and the old treasure is the treasure we have in what is written in the Old Testament.

In fact, the parable of the mustard seed draws on both the Old and New Testaments. It is not a mustard tree in the Old Testament but a sprig from a cedar tree that will grow to produce boughs and bear fruit and become a noble cedar. We read in the books of Ezekial and Daniel that God said he will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar and plant it on the mountain height of Israel.

“Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind”.

Daniel and Ezekial were both captured in Babylon, Daniel was interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Ezekial was sharing a similar parable to the exiled Israelites. Both the dream interpreter and the prophet were foretelling the coming of Christ, the noble cedar, and that he would welcome all, Jew and Gentile alike, into the kingdom of heaven.

So we have treasure in both the Old and the New Testament. We have treasure in the kingdom of heaven. We can pray, like Solomon did, that we are given wisdom and discernment, to become more Christ-like in the way we live our lives and glorify God.

I did mention earlier that discernment has become a very important word to me over the past couple of years in my journey towards ministry. Well, I am very pleased to be able to share that the assessment panel I attended the week before last wrote to Bishop Paul on Friday to recommend I progress to ordination in November. I shall continue to pray for wisdom and discernment.

Let **us** take a moment to give thanks for our ability to understand scripture.
We pray,

Lord, we thank you for the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge and confidence that you equip us to hear your word, to seek you and find you, through the teaching of the parables.