

Sermon: 26 July 2020 'What will we grow?' Matthew 13 v 31-33, 44-52, 1 Kings 3 v 5-12,

It always starts small. Anything that is real starts small. Anything that lasts starts small. And also things that are harmful destructive start small too. Bad habits. Things that need weeded out.

Solomon goes to the site at Gibeon to offer a sacrifice. The passage describes that he walks in the shadows of his father and was regular in worship. He encounters God in the night. God asks him to ask for what he wants?

So the question is this, what do you want? What do you really want? Our answer to that question says the most about us. What is our heart's desire? That reveals a lot about our heart. What do you want? In the night by yourself? What do you want? And what do you dream of? Really?

What for us is the pearl of great price that we would give up everything for?

Solomon's answer fits the biblical world but seems out of place in the less formal world of the religious language today. The three-point response (thanksgiving for his father David, thanksgiving for God's grace to give him the throne, and finally the request) fits into a formality of an earlier age that may sound strange to us. We are used to Jesus and closeness and intimacy. Let your thoughts be known in prayer is our cry. Everything – no right no wrong but this story would wonder about that.

As a wisdom tale though this story is a strange one. There are certain things you can pray for in good conscience and others that are too self-indulgent. The passage gives a rationale that makes it clear what set Solomon's request apart with the phrase, "because you asked for this, and not ..." The passage wants to instruct the reader in proper petition. The wrong answer or the petition becomes a vice. These improper petitions include a request for extrinsic things, longer life, wealth, and power based on the harm to enemies. Hey we have all prayed those but we know they are not wholesome. In other words, what you don't ask for can be as important as what you do request.

And here we are back with the small things that can grow big within us. What is our heart's desire? Really. Examine ourselves. It might be we need to get paper and a pen and privacy to make that happen. If God had asked us not Solomon what would we have said?

But surely I can pray about anything? Yes. But come on we all know that there are prayers that are childish and those that are the outworking of our spiritual journey. Please God let Newcastle win something, anything, is obviously a prayer that God is ignoring but even I know it is not actually a prayer more a heart felt plea expressed by a foolish deluded woman. Help me to know your will? Help me to do it. Serious grown up prayer.

Help me to know your will and to do it. What are the small habits activities or ways of thinking that we have got into during this time that we need to be careful about because they may cause us tremendous harm. And what do we need to allow to flower and grow.

The parables have many themes. But one of them is smallness that grows to big effects. At this moment I wonder how we could illustrate that? Something microscopic that decimates the world? Mmm!!ok the virus. So small coming from who knows where and how to change everything. I remember being in the church building when a member who had been following the news on her phone said, they are going to tell over 70's to stay at home. I was dismissive of that. Little did I know she was under stating it not over stating it.

I wonder what small seed has grown to large fruit in this time? For me in conversation people isolated have become more self obsessed. There is a lot of fear and a lot of anger. A feeling of 'I am locked away and suffering and I want things to happen like this and this'. People fearful about leaving the safety of home. One day you will have to. I wonder how life would be transformed if for all of us our perpetual heart felt prayer was help me to know and to do your will oh God. Rather than our obsessions with all the clutter of the day. The small habit of allowing that request to be the first thing that comes to our lips.

How will we know? What will we do? Jesus says that those who have been trained in kingdom ways will draw on their Jewish heritage of knowing God's ways but also the new things that God is showing them. Something new is a very important thing. Something new really matters. It is accomplishing new stuff that there is growth and development. Sit still and all is lost. What new things have we learned in this time? That is not to say though as the story says that all the old is to be thrown away but there is the old and there is new too.

Finally a warning word about Solomon. He is proverbially pictured as a great wise king of Israel. He would however not have won husband or father of the year award. The minute he is dead his son behaves in ways that lead the people to rebel and the kingdom is split. He did not train Rehoboam his son. The interesting thing about Solomon is that somewhere he loose it. Or worse maybe he does not loose. It. He still knows what is right but he choose not to do it. He gets distracted by the outside stuff. The possessions and the power with all their trappings. He is an example to us of someone who starts well and finishes badly which is not what any of us want for ourselves.

So 3 things Firstly what would we ask God? And is it the thing that we are building your life towards. Are we answering our own prayers in other words. Oh God I pray that I would be fit while I sit here on this sofa eating pizza is not a legitimate prayer. There is effort required. A response. Oh God help me to look after myself and to recognise I am your child so I do not abuse my body but cherish my flesh. Because I know how my flesh matters to you.

Secondly what are the small things in our lives that we need to allow to grow. Equally, what small things have we allowed to grow that need to be weeded out.

Thirdly how are we – each of us- discerning the will of God? Today. And keeping that as our focus.

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