

1 Kings 3:5–12; Psalm 119:129–136;
Romans 8:26–39; Matthew 13:31–33, 44–53

*I put on my Sunday clothes -I fixed my hair
Rushing all morning to get there
I sat in the pew just in time
Bowing my head in prayer
as I closed my eyes
I saw the shoe of a man next to me,
touching my own...I sighed.
With plenty of room on either side...I thought,
“Why must our soles touch?”
It bothered me, his shoe touching mine...
But it didn’t bother him much.
A prayer began... “Our Father in Heaven...” I thought, “This man with the
shoes...has no pride. They’re dusty, worn and scratched.
Even worse, there are holes on the side!
“Thank you for blessings”, the prayer went on.
The shoe man said a quiet “AMEN.”
I tried to focus on the prayer...
but my thoughts were on his shoes again.
Aren’t we supposed to look our best...
When walking through that door?
“Well, this certainly isn’t it,” I thought,
glancing toward the floor.
Then the prayer was ended and the songs of praise began. The shoe man was
certainly loud...
sounding proud as he sang...His voice lifted the rafters....his hands were raised
high....
The Lord could surely hear...
the shoe man’s voice in the sky.
It was time for the offering...
and what I threw in was steep...
I watched as the shoe man reached...
In to his pockets ever so deep.
I saw what was pulled out...what the shoe man put in.
Then I heard a soft “clink” as when silver hits tin.
The sermon really bored me-to tears, and that’s no lie.
It was the same for the shoe man...
for tears fell from his eyes.
At the end of the service...as is the custom here
We must greet new visitors and show them all good cheer....But I felt moved
somehow...*

*and I wanted to meet the shoe man
 So after the closing prayer, I reached over and shook his hand.
 He was old and his skin was dark...
 and his hair was truly a mess.
 But I thanked him for coming...for being our guest.
 He said... "My name's Charlie...I'm glad to meet you, my friend.
 There were tears in his eyes...
 But he had a large, wide grin.
 "Let me explain," he said...wiping tears from his eyes... "I've been coming here
 for months...and you're the first to say "Hi"
 I know that my appearance is not like all the rest.
 But I really do try....to always look my best
 I always clean and polish my shoes before
 My very long walk.
 But by the time I get here they're dirty and dusty
 like chalk."
 My heart filled with pain and I swallowed
 to hide my tears as he continued to apologize....
 for daring to sit so near.
 He said, "When I get here....I know I must look a sight...But I thought if I could
 touch you...
 then maybe our souls might unite."
 I was silent for a moment...knowing whatever was said would pale in comparison.
 I spoke from my heart, not my head –
 "Oh you've touched me," I said...
 "and taught me in part that the best of any person
 is what is found in his or her heart."
 The rest, I thought, this man will never know
 Like just how thankful I really am...
 that his dirty old shoe touched my soul.*

When I first heard this poem I could almost imagine Jesus sitting beside Charlie and this woman ...all the while watching and listening...can't you? Perhaps frowning and then smiling. God speaks to us through ordinary people like Charlie. Sometimes God speaks to us through places and things. The most beautiful mouthpiece God uses to speak to us is Scripture. God is alive in these pages!! What a treasure we hold in our hands. Scripture contains nuggets of knowledge, inspiration, faith, hope, love, comfort, and strength. In Psalm 119 we hear the words of longing. "Come and show me your mercy, as you do for all who love your name. Guide my steps by your words, so I will not be overcome with evil." God guides and encourages us every day as we trample through the muck and mire of our own realities. When we struggle, become overwhelmed, or just need reassurance ----we can turn to the Bible.

We can ask God to give us "an understanding heart ... so that we will know the difference between right and wrong." We read it today in First Kings 3.9 when Solomon searched for God's wisdom to help him make the right decisions. Can we not do the same? Have we become so accustomed to having the Bible in our midst that we take it for granted? I encourage each one

of us to reacquaint ourselves and get more familiar with God's Holy Word. The ELCA has given priority to the reading of scripture ---with the hope of sustaining 'a priesthood of all believers.' The Church wide body has launched a Book of Faith Initiative encouraging us to "become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture." "In order that we may live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened and empowered by the Word." (Seeds for the Parish) It is an opportunity to grow and learn together as one body of Christ. If I have peaked your interest, there is more information on the ELCA website or you can simply join the Rejoice class here at Trinity every Sunday.

As we read scripture, the words will "flow from the heart of God to the hearts of his people... [there will be] a knowledge that will impact minds" Hepner 114ff). In Paul's second letter to Timothy he reminds us that "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (II Tim 3.16-17).

When we read the Bible, remember we are unique individuals. God will enlighten us with wisdom – but that wisdom will transcend differently to each one of us. For example, have you ever sat in a Bible Study, having read and studied the text yet taken away something totally different than the others in the group? Or has God ever spoken to you in a way you have never quite heard before? As we continue to explore the Bible, we will see there is so much more to a relationship with God than we are currently experiencing (Ken Hepner). St. Paul, as he wrote to the Ephesians, desired those Christians to believe the same. He encouraged them to not "limit their walk with God to only that which they knew and understood" (115). Do we put earthly limits on what we think God can do? God is greater than anything we can imagine. When we listen and learn, God equips us with wisdom and compassion—every time —sometimes as beautiful as tears.

As students of the Word or scribes as Jesus says, we experience God in new and refreshing ways reinforced by the foundations of our tradition.

When Jesus told this parable in the Gospel lesson today, the people were hungry for more. Matt 13.52 "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." We are called by God to bring what we know; that which is old –our tradition – which has taught us about the gift of grace, and apply it to that which is new – all the new and exciting opportunities God has planned. If we are open to these opportunities, we may be surprised. Who knows, we may encounter God's love unexpectedly while going about our daily routines; or maybe we will encounter God when we intentionally search – and when we find it, we will be brought to whole a new level—contemplating the many ways Jesus continues to bless us and connect us. Reading the Bible will open our hearts and minds helping us to unlock paradigms and step into the reality of our world.

As we stand ready to make a difference we should not be afraid to ask God for the help and guidance we need. Looking at our second reading today found in Romans 8, we are reminded of a loving God. St. Paul told those believers, "He who did not withhold his Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not, with him, also give us everything else?"(Rom 8:32)

The kingdom of heaven is the here and now. But can it be as simple as two souls that touch or can God's presence be felt through something as small as a mustard seed? Yes! God's Word is like the mustard seed which grows to be a sanctuary for birds –God's Word gives us freedom to soar on the wings of eagles – to rest in the arms of God's promise to always care for us. God's Word can be small gestures in which we invite others to find shelter in the Holy Spirit's growing ministries. God's Word is like yeast where just a little bit of good news will raise the hopes and joys of all who listen. God gives us the creativity, flexibility, and energy to rise to the challenges in our communities and throughout the world.

It is a time to rejoice because Jesus tells us the kingdom of heaven is like treasure in a field, which someone found and hid –then in his joy he goes and sells EVERYTHING so he can have that treasure. Scripture is just like that!! The joy we find when we meet God is worth more than anything else we own. The message is so important that Jesus gave another example when he said “The Kingdom of heaven is like a valuable precious pearl sought out by a merchant who, when he finds it, he too sells all that he has for that one pearl. Scripture brings out of us a “joyful, willingness to sacrifice it all, whole hearted kind of commitment” (Interpretive Bible).

The kingdom of heaven lay in the treasure of the Living Word of God. This treasure is for everyone –you and me, the young, the old, the poor, the wealthy, and everyone in between. Jesus does not exclude anyone. In fact the last parable in today's gospel, Jesus tells us, “the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind” (Matt 13.47) ...fish of every kind. Jesus is talking about us. *We are those fish.* When we get caught up in God's grace and loving Word, we will hear him speaking to us. God calls you and me to plant a mustard seed today. Maybe you will be the one to add the yeast that will rise up fresh ideas. Perhaps today one of us will happen upon a treasure we never noticed before, or diligently search for that opportunity to serve– a chance to do something phenomenal because God has laid it upon our hearts. God's love will manifest in ways greater than anything we have ever experienced before... through people and through the Holy Word. God wants to meet you and me in whatever capacity... small or great, intentionally or unexpectedly. It may even be as simple and unexpected as an old worn out shoe. Amen.