

WELCOME 9 September 2018 – 16 Pentecost '18 B

Matthew 13:47-52

Good morning! Welcome to worship today!

It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

The End...from a child asking about the destiny of a deceased pet to questions we raise in hushed tones with our loved ones to the ancients who plotted times on their carved rock calendars & somehow drove an apocalyptic movie & internet industry...

What's the end of the world/of my life/of all things going to look like? As a pastor I've been asked more times than I can count. Lots of folks waiting for the book of Revelation to be played out right before their eyes...

Jesus once said: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water & caught (fish) of every kind. When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, & sorted the good (fish) into crates, but threw the bad ones away.*

That is the way it will be at the end of the world..."

What's the end going to be like? Well...The good news is

there **IS** an answer & it isn't nothing – silence – emptiness – endless cycles of the same old same old.

The answer is Jesus...Jesus promises that his death & resurrection sweep all of creation up in its forgiving grasp of grace & mercy...The hands that formed your life before time began will hold you when the last earthly clock is stopped.

I love this parable...It reminds me that the end like the beginning is God's business. But even more importantly **RIGHT NOW OUR BUSINESS** is to rejoice that in spite of ourselves God has chosen us in Christ to be part of his eternal joy & life that never ends & to share that good news as widely as we can.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father God, remind me minute-by-minute that this life is not all about us but all about what you have already done for us in your Son. Your word promises a day when every knee will bow & every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord & your Kingdom will be made complete. Lead us to live focused on Jesus & fully in the light of your kingdom present among us now. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen

16 PENTECOST '18 B – CONTRAST – PARABLE OF THE NET

FAITH CHAT: 1. Have you ever thought of God as “keeping score” of your sins & mistakes?
2. Why would someone refuse the grace extended by God through Jesus?

It struck me this week that just one year ago...the world was holding held its breath as Nth Korea launched missiles into the sea of Japan & beyond & conducted massive underground nuclear test explosions...we were all asking questions about the potential conclusion of human/cosmic history...nothing new

From a child asking about the destiny of a deceased pet to questions we raise in hushed tones with our loved ones to the ancients who plotted times on their carved rock calendars...every human being every human society every human culture is curious. What happens when this life is over? And Jesus was pretty clear on a number of occasions....

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net (dragnet) that was thrown into the water & caught (fish) of every kind. When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, & sorted the good (fish) into crates, but threw the bad ones away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world...”

BIBLES

A couple of quick observations about the parable...Fishermen in Jesus' day fished basically 3 ways: Handlines...like a fishing pole w/o the pole. Cast net – circular throwable weighted collapsing sack.

Then there was the dragnet...seine...anchored on shore & drawn in a sweeping arc by a boat eventually catching everything within the arc OR dragged b/t or behind two boats like a prawn trawler. That's what Jesus is talking about here...This is the only time this word appears in the Bible; so it is clear Jesus chose this word/net to make a particular point. This type of net gets dragged through the water & picks up EVERYTHING in its path. So when you throw this net overboard you get EVERYTHING: seaweed, fish, bicycles, hubcaps, ex-mafia bosses... EVERYTHING.

Also interestingly...in the Greek text of the NT the word “fish” isn't there. Translators inserted the word. The text literally reads, “Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was thrown into the water & caught all kinds/every kind.” Gk reader would have said of course...this kind of net grabs up all kinds of everything & then the fishermen drag the net ashore & sit down & sort...They keep what's according to their intention & discard what isn't. Whatever serves the fisherman's purpose is kept. Whatever doesn't is tossed.

This is the concluding parable of the 7 that Matthew records here...It serves to sum up the 6 that have gone before. By now Jesus has sent the crowds home & he's in a house with only the disciples...only those who are being closely taught.

The temptation is to get straight to the sorting...Yesiree! Now the bad fish get theirs! But that's not how Jesus told this parable...The Kingdom of Heaven is like the whole process...

Which means what? Well...let's see...The unfolding truth Jesus has given to the crowds & his followers over the course of the parables was simply this: The Father is the God of extravagant relentless love. Father chooses to suffer & forgive evil as the way evil is overcome. He doesn't root it out at first notice because forgiveness & self-giving love are stronger than any evil this world might conjure up. Father's love is so powerful it makes the whole creation beautiful & brand new. All things will be made new even though right now the Kingdom is hidden in things that look small & insignificant & powerless. But like yeast/seed small with big result...Christ's death, rez & rule in grace & our living trusting in that victory in Christ transform all things. God will bring his Kingdom to fullness in joy & love.

Once you know how deeply loved & treasured you are by the Father; once you understand that your destiny is one of joy & delight in Father's presence forever you commit your whole existence...lock/stock/barrel...whatever it takes to live out that joy that love that hope that peace that forgiveness every moment of every day & you experience the healing & restoration & rescue & strength that only Father's love in Jesus Christ unleashed in you by the Holy Spirit can give.

Which means...?

Jesus here says the kingdom is a present tense reality in him. The kingdom is not something we look forward to like our next birthday or the birth of our 1st grandchild. The kingdom is at work through his death & resurrection already. For Christ's sake we are already in the net...And as those who are in on the joyous mystery of a victory already won for us & guaranteed to deliver abundantly both now & in the age to come we dare not think the sorting will come at our command...We have a role & the sorting isn't it. The kingdom/good news will drag up all kinds of everything & our job is to make sure the net stays in the water & reaches the widest & deepest extremity of the ocean around us.

Our work as church...the glimpse of the kingdom here on earth...isn't social reform; it's not therapeutic, we are not moral cops...Our work is clear & specific. We have one Word, one message...God, in Jesus comes personally in love to rescue & rebuild all things by Jesus' death/resurrection. We do not announce judgment...not on us to scold the world to

straighten up/fly right...but to announce that forgiveness & reconciliation with the Father has already been granted & to tell people they are already beloved by God. They don't have to do anything to earn it, it is done.

We simply say this net/kingdom is for you too. You have a Saviour named Jesus.

But John...what about that sorting out & weeping & gnashing of teeth? What about that? Ok...what about that? *“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that was thrown into the water & caught all sorts of every kind. When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, & sorted the good into crates, but threw the bad away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come & separate the wicked from the righteous, throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth.”* As the last of 7 parables...this is a parable of judgment...But on what basis?

Most of us when we see the words “good/bad” think ethics – morals – doing right doing wrong. But the Gk words actually used there more commonly suggest beautiful/benevolent/admirable (Jesus called himself the *good shepherd* it's not about his ethics/morals but about his intentions for the sheep) vs menacing/disagreeable/combatative. Whatever/whoever is selected from the net does not depend on the innate goodness or badness in themselves, but rather their acceptability to the fishermen. Whatever serves the fisherman's purpose is kept & whatever doesn't is tossed out. It isn't the fish who set the standard for the day of judgment, it is the fishermen.

We have to get this right...No one is tossed aside because they had a bad track record here on earth. Just as no one is selected because they had a good one. It isn't our works that make us acceptable to the Father. The only thing we are judged by is what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus declared “forgiven” over the entire world in his death/rez & **THAT** is the only standard by which anyone is judged. And if **THAT** fisherman announced his forgiven over every single sinner in the world, how much more should the church be pronouncing the same forgiven over the sinners with whom we interact.

And look at when all this happens: *That is the way it will be at the end of the world...* You're going to like this...*End of the world* is the Greek word *synteleia*. It suggests not just an end but the arrival of something that has been in process. *Telos* which is the root word means end, goal, purpose. So Jesus says at the end, when his purpose has been brought to completion, is when the benevolent & menacing are sorted. Now in 13 chapters, Mt records the betrayal/arrest/trial/crucifixion & death of Jesus. When he dies what does he say? “It is finished” “It has been accomplished,” or the Greek: *tetelestai*. That is the same Greek word Jesus uses to say when this judgment/sorting happens. So this means, from Jesus' point of view, the final fruition of Jesus' work, the end goal & purpose of what God is up to & the judgment that was to come happened with Jesus' death on the cross/rising from the dead...all sin is judged & paid for on the cross.

What this means is that judgment is done. It has been completed. We are there. The judgment we thought we were waiting with great glee to witness as the bad fish finally get theirs is done on the cross already. Not a one of us is judged on our works good or bad. We are not judged in the right or wrong decisions we have made. We are not judged by what we have accomplished acquired or accumulated: what we have done or left undone. We are judged only by Jesus' work on the cross. When the Father looks at the human race he sees his Son...Crucified/risen/ruling all things in grace. No one ever on earth deserves to be part of God's family...It's all a gift of grace from the crucified & risen Jesus...

The only way to be separated from the party is to walk on by. All those that really want to ruin the party & stay outside & refuse to delight in the accepting love of the Father, just stay outside, & for them it will be hell. There is no room for those who refuse to accept God's forgiving acceptance. There is no room for those who try to get accepted on their own merit. Look...hell is just a courtesy for those who insist they want no part of forgiveness – who are convinced God owes them a favour or that God isn't ever going to have a word to say about them...The Creeds say Jesus descended into hell...Luther rightly understood he went there not to suffer but to reign & to kick the gates off their hinges & declare that the captives were free.

Hell ought to be empty but only those who really want to go there will. CS Lewis in his magnificent book *The Great Divorce* poses that moment when someone sees how this sorting eventuates...“It must be one way or the other. Either the day will come when joy prevails & all the makers of misery are no longer able to infect it; or else for ever & ever the makers of misery can destroy in others the joy they reject for themselves.” Do you understand all these things? Jesus asked...

What's the end going to be like? The good news is there *IS* an answer: not silence – emptiness – endless cycles of the same old same old. The answer is Jesus who promises that his death & resurrection sweep all of creation up in its forgiving grasp of grace & mercy...The hands that formed your life before time began will hold you when the last earthly clock is stopped. The end like the beginning is God's business. But even more importantly RIGHT NOW OUR BUSINESS is to rejoice that in spite of ourselves God has chosen us in Christ to be part of his eternal joy & life that never ends & to share that good news as widely as we can.

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father, thank you that your Son gathers us in the net of his forgiving death and resurrection. Thank you that you see us redeemed in him and not lost in ourselves. Teach us to share your love widely and joyously so that all we know might know you and find themselves named your Beloved. In Jesus' Name we pray...Amen.**