

July 26, 2020 8th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

1 Kings 3:5-12, Romans 8:26-39
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

[Ideas from the Working Preacher podcast for this Sunday, including the quote from Rev. Joy J. Moore.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-12/walking-wind> (John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), xvi–xvii. Wind of Grace comes from the title of Tim Gustafson's song played by the ULCHers as prelude.]

**Peace to you—surprising, sustaining peace—from our God:
Creator, Christ, and Wind of Grace. Amen.**

Our readings this morning are a bounty, a swirl, and there's wisdom in each of them.

I tried mightily to figure out how to weave them together.

Instead let me share some reflections on each, a mini Bible study of sorts, and then a story.

The first reading, from Kings, is about the newly minted King Solomon.

Solomon's father, King David has died.

Solomon has taken the throne and would-be rivals have been dealt with.

In a sleepy, dreamy state, when our control is low and our openness is high,

Solomon and God talk.

I find Solomon's prayer illuminating, humbling:

Solomon prays for an understanding mind.

He prays that he'll be a good leader for the people, a leader for the common good.

He prays that he and they can discern what is right, can discern between good and evil.

Did you know that the line we read as "to discern what is right," is perhaps better translated from the

Hebrew: "to hear justice"?

He prays that he is able to hear justice.

Solomon has spent his years watching David's success and also, surely, his failures.

Now as part of this next generation, as he picks up the mantle, he's praying for the wisdom of God so that he can hear and do justice.

That's a prayer all of us can use, every generation, leaders or followers,

asking God for an understanding mind,

asking for discernment, for guidance, for the ability to hear justice and to do justice.

It's also prayer to pray for our leaders of all sorts,

especially with elections approaching.

Just as we pray for friends and family, pray for leaders, those you agree with and those you don't.

Write letters, protest, speak out, yes, and also pray for these leaders, pray for wisdom.

The reading from Romans 8 is rich and includes snippets that are favorites for many.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness.

The Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

Our tradition prides itself on the freedom to come to God directly....

But there is value in intercessors, those who play a middle role, hearing and carrying prayers, especially when we alone can't bear them.

When our prayers come out only as sighs, or tears,

when we can't pray ourselves (and even when we can),

the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, prays in our stead, like we do for others, the Holy Spirit does for us.

What a gift that the Holy Spirit is our intercessor, knowing our hearts, our minds, our needs, and letting our sighs, our cries, our very breath, be enough.

During the reading of the Romans passage, you added your words, things that can not, will not, separate us from the love of God.

Thank you for adding these.

Let me read some of them aloud.

I'm convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come... can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We're convinced that neither [world wide pandemic, nor COVID 19, nor racism, nor stressful parenting, nor isolation nor fears about health...] _____ nor _____ [ADD] can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this season when we have often felt so separated from those we love and from our routines, our communities, perhaps also from God, this passage speaks.

Romans 8 is so full.

Take some time this week to read it on your own or with your family, just reading a few lines at a time, dwelling with it, letting it shape you.

Finally, let's look at today's Gospel.

This type of parable is meant to cast one thing next to something else.

So here, Jesus is telling stories, trying to explain God's reign, God's kin-dom.

I am intrigued at the way Jesus uses such incredibly ordinary examples.

Jesus could have used big powerful examples:

The kin-dom of heaven is like the mighty, far-reaching, Roman empire, for instance.

But instead, Jesus begins, the kin-dom of heaven is like a mustard seed that grows and flourishes.

Or, the kin-dom of heaven is like yeast that leavens

Or, the kin-dom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, or like a pearl of value.

The “invincible invisible,” Joy Moore calls it: These tiny, simple, ordinary examples that help us understand the surprising and powerful way that God’s works: beginning with the mighty and the small.

The kin-dom of God is so precious, it is worth everything that you have.

The kin-dom of heaven surprises us, showing up where we least expect it, reminding us of what is possible.

I’ve been moved this week with the reporting about longtime civil rights leader US Representative John Lewis.

His 1998 memoir is titled *Walking with the Wind*.

In the introduction, explaining his choice of titles, Lewis tells the story from his childhood of a summer day that had become stormy, the sky darkening, the wind picking up, lightening flashing in the distance:

“About fifteen of us children were outside my aunt Seneva’s house, playing in her dirt yard,” he wrote.

Aunt Seneva gathered them inside the little house.

Their laughter and play had given way to quiet terror.

The wind howled, the rains pounded, and the house began to shake, then to sway,

and the wooden floor boards upon which they stood began to bend.

“And then,” he wrote, “a corner of the room started lifting up...This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky” with Aunt Seneva and the 15 children inside.

Aunt Seneva instructed the kids line up and hold hands and to walk together toward the corner of the room that was rising.

Back and forth they went from the kitchen to the front, “walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of [their] small bodies.”

Lewis reflects, “More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.”

He continues, “It seemed that way in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms.

But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away.

They stayed, they came together and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.”

And then another corner would lift, and we would go there.”

He continues, "And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand.

But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again.

And we did. And we still do, all of us. You and I.

Children holding hands, walking with the wind. . . . "

There's a parable-like quality to Representative Lewis' story from that stormy day so many years ago,
Holding hands, walking with the wind.

Their small bodies laced together, attentive to the need, held by grace, offering a vision of God's kin-dom,
God's promise and the work that is before us.

What's my prayer today?

It echoes Solomon's, and Paul's, and Jesus' too:

God, give us the discernment to see your reign, your kin-dom, in new ways,
in surprising places,
in unexpected people.

To hear justice, and to do justice, for the common good.

To know the grace that swirls around us in this time
when we may feel like we're being pulled apart at the seam.

The Holy Spirit intercedes, prays for us, and in us, and through us.

For nothing, nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen.