Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

This is one of those Sundays when a pastor really can’t lose in picking a text. Solomon asking for wisdom is a rich and beautiful example of a humble heart in a leader asking for what was best for his people, not for himself. The lesson from Romans is one of my favorites to read and to quote – especially when I minister to people or I, myself, feel like I am in a situation where no good result is possible. But as I read the lessons for this week a little snippet – just a few words of a song kept playing in my mind, not like an earworm, but as a point to ponder, “They say that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also… I have found my treasure in You (Jesus).”

I spent hours trying to track down that song – even went to the source of all wisdom and knowledge about Contemporary Christian solos, our own Building Manager, Brian Kruchowski. We were convinced it had been done by one of those three-named Christian singers (funny how serial killers always have three names, too). We looked through the works of Michael W. Smith, Stephen Curtis Chapman, went to a two-namer, Steve Green, but as I was cleaning my office I found the old tape jacket…but not the tape by Scott Wesley Brown of his song My Treasure. So the full lyrics are not available and you will be spared my rendition. Searching for treasure can be very frustrating – especially when it keeps leading to dead ends, but oh the riches there are to mine in the parables for this day.

Way at the end of today’s Gospel reading, Jesus spoke some rather cryptic words about those who are "trained for the kingdom of heaven" being like "the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is old and what is new." And as I struggled to get a grip on the five pithy parables that make up today's Gospel, it occurred to me that I think Jesus was talking about me. Not me, alone, of course, but the "me", like all of you who are, slowly but surely being trained by God's Spirit to dig into what we have known and have experienced of God in His word and in our lives and to combine that with what we are learning and are experiencing right now, as well as being open to what is still to come. So, the treasure hunt into our text begins.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone sowed that started out a small scrubby shrub but in time turned into a towering tree, filled with bunches of branches and birds.” First, a little reminder that applies to all Jesus' parables: what connects the parable to us is not a thing but a series of actions taken together, more like a movie than a photograph. So, the kingdom of heaven is not like a mustard seed - only a mustard seed is like a mustard seed. But the kingdom of heaven is like that whole process that started with seed sowing and ended with a tree full of birds in its branches. The kingdom of heaven is a process by which God's intention is turned into action and then into completion.

So let's start with a mustard seed. The only thing about its size is the surprise of its potential, way beyond giving us something to squirt on a hot dog. But nobody expected a mustard shrub to turn into a tree, let alone become shelter for the birds that would nest in it. And in fact, anyone looking at such a thing might conclude that the mustard seed had no business turning into a tree.

So here's Jesus, this peripatetic Palestinian preacher, proclaiming the kingdom of heaven and despite the raising of a few hopes here and there, nobody back then would have dared to believe the impact He would make on human history, by Himself, becoming a seed, planted in His death and raised so that we "birds of a sinful feather" would nest our hope in Him. Nobody, not even Jesus' closest disciples could have imagined just how huge, how all encompassing, how world-changing this "mustard seed messiah" was going to be.

Now I used to think that Jesus' parables were mostly about us, but while they give us great insight into who we are, ultimately, they are not so much about us as they are about Him. And so as much we preachers like to talk about your potential to do something good in this world (which you do have) the kingdom of heaven is happening, not because we're spunky little seeds that can become sturdy shrubs, but because Jesus embodied God's kingdom and brought it here to us. And for that, I am not only content to be one of those birds out on His limbs, I am honored; I am encouraged; I am grateful that He has taken us on as puny and unpromising as we often are and given us a place in His Kingdom.

Jesus also said "the kingdom of heaven" is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." Well, anybody who bakes bread knows what yeast does. It's a great image, especially in Bible times, because you didn't buy yeast, in those little foil packets, you got it from someone else. Young women when they left home and married were given some of the yeast from her parents' home so it was passed down from generation to generation, the same way we all bear the guilt of original sin.
Now imagine yourselves hearing that the kingdom of heaven is like sin scattered into flour. Outrageous! So what's the point? Is it just that the kingdom of heaven grows mysteriously, hidden like yeast in bread dough? Yes, that's part of it. But I think Jesus was aiming at something deeper---like the Scripture that says God made Jesus, the sinless one, to be "sin for us," so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Everything that is wrong with the world, everything that is wrong in us, the brokenness of sin that has permeated all of human society, He absorbed into Himself.

You know how you get rid of yeast? You kill it – you bake it to death; that's the only way to end its effect. When you kill the leaven, something new can take its place, and that's where Jesus was leading His disciples, to a new understanding that where sin once ruled, a new spirit now resides - a spirit that helps us in our weakness; that talks to God for us even when our conscious selves don't have the words or the will to do it.

A lot of people miss that when they read Romans, as we did today. We jump ahead to that "all things work together for good" because we like happy endings, but we miss the mystery of God living inside of us, changing us as we are discipled into the kingdom of heaven.

Discipling is a process – like the mustard seed growing that I mentioned earlier. The process begins with God imparting faith and our being joined into the family of God, the body of Christ and it is fed by worship and partaking of the sacrament of the altar, in fellowship and in prayer…but it’s not just the learning, it’s in being – resting in the fact that the Spirit of God is at work in all we are experiencing – even our bad choices – and that we are always, always, forgiven and loved. We are always, each day of our lives, students of the best teacher – Jesus, at work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

One of my students remarked to me recently that they enjoyed my class because it was so evident that I love teaching. It was rather a surprising compliment as I didn’t see it coming - when I taught little ones I could see the interest (or lack of it) in their faces – that, even more than their tests grades meant something to me because they were excited about and engaged in learning – in the process of becoming – in the being.

Which is where, I suppose, I could begin to guilt you into regret that you are not as excited about the Treasure that is Jesus – the Pearl of Great Price – that is ours in our Savior…but I said earlier that it might do us well to consider that the parable is not about us and what we should do or how we should feel as it is about Jesus.

And so ponder this – what if you are the treasure hidden in the field, you are the pearl of great price – think of the joy that God had in giving up everything for you and for me. It was worth it all – is worth it all for God, to give us His Wisdom – the greatest Wisdom of all (and we are, after all, very foolish), it is worth the Spirit having to cry out on our behalf when we don’t even know what we should be praying for, it is worth God’s working through all the trials, tribulations, hardships – to bridge each chasm that seems to us to be an ultimate separator from the love of God – death, life, angels, rulers, the present, the future, height, depth, or the caveat: anything that is in all creation (because God knows that like pesky children we’re always looking for a loophole) – it is worth God’s being intimately involved in your life and mine day after day – because you are a treasure to God.

Those lyrics that haunted me this week – well, to be honest, they haunted me because I know I don’t treasure the treasure of faith, of knowing Jesus the way that I should…so it would have been difficult to sing those words with conviction, but those are ultimately words of self-defeat and not words of Gospel or Grace. The truth is – the treasure has found you and calls you His treasure. Ponder that my friends – let the truth of that love permeate your being and let the Spirit make your heart sing in excitement at all that God has to teach you. Amen.

Now may God's peace that surpasses all human understanding open our hearts and minds to Him as His Spirit trains us to serve in His kingdom.

+ Amen +