

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Bob Goldstein

July 30, 2017

*“...the master of a household brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

What does Jesus mean by “treasure that is new and that is old?” It is something like this.

I witnessed a poetry reading by a Catholic lady at a theological event. She was a woman with the mellifluous accent of the bayous of Louisiana. After her reading, the facilitator declared that her poem was revolutionary. She didn't seem pleased.

Someone raised his hand and said rather boldly, “For me the poem is not revolutionary. Rather, the poem is representing the ancient faith with her new heartfelt words.” She smiled.

In every generation, we Christians are to become poets of our faith. We have to restate that ancient treasure in new ways.

When Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* was published in 1859, it threw the Western church into turmoil. Suddenly, creation by God seemed to be replaced by a heartless process of natural selection. Where wiser Christian heads prevailed, the new science was welcomed, even though a new response from the treasure of the faith was not yet available.

At Princeton Seminary, NJ, however, unwise heads prevailed. Theologians rejected Darwin and science outright. The Bible was moved into a fortress made of rigid literalism and rigid doctrines. To Princeton's credit, these theologians left and started the Fundamentalist Movement that refuses to take God's gift of science as a threat to their bible and their doctrines. They are still God's children. But who wants a life dominated by fear and anxiety?

Our church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has endeavored to be faithful to our ancient faith and to science. We take the advances in science thankfully, as a gift from God, and invoke the Holy Spirit to lead us in bringing new ways of stating the ancient treasures in light of scientific and cultural advances: treasure that is new and that is old together.

Jesus is restating his ancient faith in a new way. His new way is revealed by his parables. They hint rather than explain –to help us grasp God's wisdom for life. When Jesus says “the kingdom of heaven,” he does not mean the church itself, but the vision of what the church could

become. Take this parable of a tiny, tiny mustard seed which grows into a bush so that the birds make nests in its branches. What do you make of it? Could be lots of things.

But I see the old and new: We may seem tiny and insignificant as individuals and as a church in Chicago. But, by the grace of God, we, as Wicker Park Lutheran Church, can grow in Christ to shelter people from the hot sun of their sufferings. Mustard seeds, be bold!

Are we not already a place for healing, safety, and socialization of people who often feel so isolated and alienated? Shall we, with the nests of families who live in our branches, continue to bring moral nurture and accompaniment to all the rites of passage, not in private isolation, but in a loving human community called church. There's a vision here. Never underestimate how God can give you courage in your life and in your church.

Again, tiny yeast does marvelous things turning dull flour into tasty bread. Put Jesus' yeast into our community and we can be bread for our communities, for those hungry and for those spiritually hungry. The yeast and the mustard seed are tiny but have extraordinary effects when we dare to try making the world a better place. Jesus is asking us to be bold. To envision the church as he calls us to become.

Jesus doesn't want you to put your faith on autopilot. Your involvement in church and community will, to your surprise and joy, reveal buried treasure of wisdom. Do we realize the unfathomable depths of riches in being the church in our community? Do we realize the depth of riches in the Scriptures in conversation with our lives and with our world?

Does your faith hide a pearl of great value? Ask God for the grace to be given the eyes to see that pearl. Living for others brings out both old and new treasures unseen. The secret pearl of life.

And finally, the last gem of wisdom from Jesus that the church too often fails to keep. Jesus' vision for the church is like fishers hauling in their catch. We can boldly and humbly haul in the catch. But separating the good from the bad belongs to God's angels at the end of time –never, ever for us! God is the judge.

If we judge others by our own righteousness, we are lost. For we have no righteousness except self-righteousness. Christ alone is our righteousness and that righteousness is lovingly given to us by God's grace every day. When you use cleansing water to start your day, remember that you are baptized. Indeed, we all need to learn to live each day at a time. And that's the wisdom and the point. Let us envision our church as a place to learn to forgive one another and to serve our

neighbor –as hard as that may be at times.

Those old, old parables, bring to us the wisdom of God anew. Amen