

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday 2008

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If you read the Boston Globe, yesterday, you may have seen the extensive obituary of Randy Pausch, at age 47. Dr Pausch became famous for his “last lecture”. Living with and dying of pancreatic cancer, his last lecture celebrated the life he had always dreamed of living instead of concentrating on impending death. In his Commencement speech this past May at Carnegie Mellon where he taught computer science he said that could look back and say, “pretty much any time I got the chance to do anything cool, I tried to grab for it. And that’s where my solace came from. We don’t beat the reaper by living longer; we beat the reaper by living well and living fully. After his death, his wife thanked all the people who had sent their condolences and said her husband was proud that that his lecture and book “inspired parents to revisit their priorities, particularly their relationships with their children.”

Although a story like this would have engaged me at any time given its power and inspiration, knowing that we would hear the Gospel, which speaks of seeking and finding the treasure and the pearl of great price, I found the story even more relevant. In this short but pithy Gospel, Jesus speaks of the pearl of great price, or the treasure, something or someone in life you find that is of such value to you that you are willing to “sell all you have” to obtain it. Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a very human experience of finding something so valuable that it shapes the rest of your life. Nothing is of any value in comparison to what you have found.

But there is a “catch” in the parable. As in all of the parables Jesus tells, they are not obvious. If they are too obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. The parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God’s desire for this world.

In today’s scripture the first reading from the book of Kings may give us an entrée into the parable of the pearl and the treasure. In a dream Solomon hears the voice of God saying, Ask for what you want and I will give it to you. What is interesting about Solomon’s response is that he is not asking for wealth, a long life or victory over his enemies, what he asks for is a “discerning heart” so that he might know to govern God’s people wisely. What he asks for really, is that he have what he needs to do God’s will, to align his desires with God’s desire for God’s people. Everything else is of little value in comparison to this gift of having what is necessary to do God’s will. (Now in Solomon’s case he did get wealth, a long life and victory over his enemies but after a while he lost that discerning heart. The book of Kings blames his 700 foreign wives and 300 concubines for turning his heart from God. I guess his wisdom wore out, or something wore him out)

In the parables today, it’s easy to focus on the treasure and the pearl of great price in a way that is about one’s personal desires. “What is it in my life that I consider so valuable that I would be willing to reorient my life for this, sell all that I have for this one thing or some one.” Even the most altruistic response: The one thing I want is an end to war, a cure for cancer, health and happiness for my family, may be missing the point of the parable. What Jesus says is that the Kingdom of God, God’s desire is what is more precious, more valuable than anything else, worth selling all you have for.

This is certainly what Jesus of Nazareth lived fully.

For Jesus the pearl of great price was his relationship with his “abba” and his passion for God’s dream for the world. Nothing else was of any value to Jesus. He was so alive in God that everything had to be in alignment with God’s will, God’s desire for mercy, compassion, justice. Jesus’ prayer that we know by heart “Your kingdom come, Your will be done” came from Jesus’ discerning heart that was always aligned with God’s vision, God’s dream, God’s desire for this creation.

This coming week on Thursday, July 31<sup>st</sup> we celebrate the feast of St Ignatius of Loyola. After Ignatius’ conversion experience, nothing in this world was of any value to him except knowing that he was responding in love to God’s call. Ignatius knew that in aligning himself with Jesus, “seeing him more clearly, loving him more intensely, following him more closely” was the way of “doing the will of the Father” This intimate relationship with God, in Jesus, through the Spirit was Ignatius’ treasure, his pearl of great price. Like Solomon, Ignatius prayed for a “discerning heart” so that he could more and more align his life in loving response to the God of all creation.

And for us, when we pray “your kingdom come, your will be done” do we really passionately mean it? Is what we desire a “discerning heart” so that our desires might be shaped and formed by God’s desires? And will we ask, as Ignatius asked for the grace to see Jesus more clearly, love him more intensely so that we might follow him more closely?

