

I'd like to turn our minds back a few years to Fr. David's licensing. Today's readings are those same readings used for his installation, and so when I realised I was going to preach on these readings I tried to recall what the preacher said then. My recollection of that sermon was the value of a pearl. The preacher talked then about the historical value of pearls. He recalled The story of Cleopatra crushing one to eat, challenging Mark Anthony to do likewise was told, and the preacher explained this was an empire changing power move because of the value of a simple pearl.

When I was about 10 I went on tour with my choir to America. I had a great time with some of my lifelong friends. We sang in about fifteen different churches ranging from Lutheran to Episcopalian. I remember we had a free day in San Fransico, in the docks area, and I went to purchase a pearl for my mother. I was a young choir boy with nowt but \$100 to my name (and that was meant to last me the whole tour), so you might be wondering how I came by such a wonderful gift?

In the modern day there are two types of pearl. Wild pearls and Farmed pearls. Both are very beautiful but one is far more valuable than the other, I did a little research and wild pearls can regularly go for upwards of £50,000. Needless to say I paid the pearl merchant \$20 for the pearl and another \$10 to have it mounted on a neckless. In today's parable a merchant sells everything he

owns for one priceless pearl. I suppose if it were me I might value a Guarneri violin, but for some people it might be a nice house or fast car.

The Kingdom of God has a higher value than one can possibly imagine. My poor mind cannot comprehend what joys await in the Kingdom of God. A merchant gives all he has to gain his prize, It made me wonder when have I committed everything to entering the Kingdom of Heaven? Can I honestly say I have always walked the walk and talked the talk? No. I can only speak for myself, but the Christian journey is hard. I get angry, I can be lazy, I can be too proud and I don't give as much as I could to the homeless. I think the real gift of God, and by extension His kingdom, is grace. Forgiveness of our misdemeanours, our faults and faux pas. The gift of a fresh chance to do better.

In the second parable we are told about some fishermen. The men haul their net home and empty it, saving the pristine fish and throwing the lousy away. We are then told Angels with throw the wicked into the furnace at the end of the age. This “fires” our need for justice. We believe God is the ultimate judge who will mediate and deliver ultimate justice at the end of time. In some ways we need to believe that the bad will be punished, so there is a challenge to continue to do good. The Angels mete out God's justice. But where does the real gift of God come into this parable?

It all made me think of some of my favourite stories, those in C.S. Lewis chronicles of Narnia.

There are two parable like stories, that are worth considering in this situation. The story of the Dwarves, and the story of Eustace.

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it,” is the first thing we hear about Eustace, and throughout his first book he is a thoroughly unpleasant young man. Proud, gluttonous, argumentative and avaricious. Eustace is transformed into a dragon by his avarice and lust for gold. It is perhaps not life or death but what Aslan (who as I am sure we all know a thinly veiled stand in for Jesus), does for Eustace is transformative. Eustace never believed in Aslan, and never gave credence to believers. In his darkest dragon hour, Aslan visits Eustace and because Eustace believes and repents, he is returned to his human form. This transformation is notably painful, and something Eustace himself cannot do. Aslan, like Jesus, helps him and he is forgiven for his past mistakes and choices.

Later, in the Last Battle, several groups of people enter ‘the real Narnia’

Lewis’s interpretation of the Kingdom of God. The dwarves are historically a morally neutral race, serving only their own ends. In the end the dwarves are provided for, they are so close to entering the Kingdom of God, or ‘the real Narnia’ as it is in the book. Aslan tries very hard to help them see

but they cannot. In the end Aslan says “They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning over belief. Their prison is only their own minds yet they are in that prison and are so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.” Aslan was willing to help and forgive, as God is always willing to give us His grace. But His great gift must be accepted. Some people, the example being dwarves, cannot comprehend the saving power of Christ Jesus, and so they cannot accept the wonderful gift God longs to give them.

So, returning to my choir tour, I learnt a great deal, Pearls are made from pain.

Oysters get something a little like an infection from a waterborne irritant and they grow a pearl to protect themselves from it. Something beautiful and something priceless comes from an infection. I am a sinful person, who one day, hopefully, might be transformed into a pearl but God’s grace. As Martin Luther said in his justification of faith:

“Be a sinner, sin boldly, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world.” As Christians we know Jesus has saved us and we are loved by God just as we are. Our challenge is to accept God’s love and to go out and model forgiveness in the community. For, we ultimately know; “The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.”