

**6. Sonntag nach Trinitatis, Hanover International Worship,
Sermon on 1. Kings 3, 5-12; Gospel of Matthew 13, 44-46 –
A Matter of Choice; Stephanstift-Church, Hanover, July 15, 2007**

1 Kings 3, 5-12 -

"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. "Now, O Lord, my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of ours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

Gospel of Matthew 13, 44-46 -

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Dear Friends, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
today's biblical Readings are all but stories.

We heard stories that do not get lost in dogmatics
or in "one-way" lecturing at people.

These stories talk about what happened between God and people.

They are very concrete and surprising in their unfolding,

They provide us with human faces who tell us,
where and how God encounters people.

They share with us their awe, and the deep traces
the encounter with God has printed in their lives;

and last, but not least, they offer a message
pointing way beyond the particular moments that are recollected.

If you look at the highlight of the story we heard first from the book of Kings:

God appears in the middle of a night,
when Solomon, the king of Israel, was dreaming.

Solomon, ask whatever you want me to give you (V.5),
God tells him.

We may be surprised to realise:

God is not telling Solomon “Do this!” or “Stop doing that!” -
nor is God pounding him with endless orders.

No! God instead is waiting for Solomon,
to let him know what he would like God to do for him!

Think for a moment, dear friends:

how would you respond to this request coming from God?
What would you ask God to do for you?

Listen again to Solomon’s response:

**Lord, my God, you have made your servant king
in place of my father David.
But I am still young and do not know how to carry out my
duties...**

**So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people
and to distinguish between right and wrong. (V.9)**

Addressing his limitations to follow through with his duties, Solomon,
the king, is quite honest not only with himself but also with God!

Solomon must trust God deeply to be engaged in his life
and to provide him with such an essential gift he needed!

God was pleased, we can read on.

God must have been touched that Solomon's top item on the list was nothing to improve his very own career or his personal wealth.

Happily God fulfilled Solomon's prayer, empowering him with **a wise and discerning heart in administering justice among the people** (V.10-12).

Can you imagine, dear friends,
that God not only may ask you for your needs -
but also provide you with all that is needed to fulfill them?

Can you imagine that God will empower you
to make a meaningful difference to your life
and to the life of those around you?!

The stories we heard from the Gospel of Matthew offer other highlights.

They tell us, the **Kingdom of God**, "Heaven",
the time God's promises are fulfilled,
is on earth and can be located in daylight!

In other words:

The **Kingdom of God** is as attractive, is as exciting as a **treasure**,
is as valuable as an extraordinary fine **pearl** a merchant would love
to buy!

In both stories the people who discovered the treasure and the pearl
unexpectedly, gave everything they had,
everything that used to be of value to them.

All they wanted was to get this new treasure, this incredible pearl.

Dear friends: Where do you and I let these two parables touch and influence the values we treasure and care for in our daily life?

Now, that summer break is close, activities will calm down, and people relax a bit more than during the “high season”.

Perhaps this time offers a good opportunity to look back into the past months:

What is it you may call a **treasure** or a **pearl** of outstanding value?

Where were you able to witness – and to rejoice in – the gift of **a wise and discerning heart in administering justice among the people?**

Where were you yourself able to draw from wisdom nurtured by God?

Reflecting on it myself, I would like to share with you my own perspective in regards to these questions:

The church I presently serve has been struck by a conflict cutting deep into the hearts and minds of the people involved.

This congregation merged with the neighboring one.

Due to decreasing membership and increasing financial challenges.

one of the two church buildings were to be closed at some time.

Yet, the church leadership got an offer to sell this church much sooner than anybody had expected.

A core group of members was not ready to go along with this.

They wanted to hold on to their church - and they did.

The conflict got increasingly worse.

Several months later people on both sides had to realize they had underestimated each other's persistency.

A couple of weeks ago when the opponents gathered for another session to resolve the conflict, no one felt they were close to any joint agreement.

Yet, in a surprising move: they succeeded in finding one!

“They...succeeded”?

I have not heard any one of those who participated in the talks claiming to have provided the decisive clue so that everybody would sign the agreement.

I do believe God’s wisdom worked her way into their minds and hearts moving and preparing them to support an agreement that indeed challenged their long held opposite stands.

“They...succeeded”: for me it is the people around the table - plus God’s wisdom!

The **Kingdom of God** may be as obvious as a **treasure** or a fine **pearl** suddenly discovered in the field, as the story from the gospel of Matthew tells us.

The gift of a **wise and a discerning heart to govern people and to distinguish between right and wrong**, the gift of God’s wisdom is not as visible as an object, yet, it may act like a driving force during a milestone session as the one in my church I mentioned.

It tells me:

God’s wisdom, God’s guidance may touch people in a hidden way and move them even by surprise.

There are other stories of faith in our present time to be treasured,
stories that God may rejoice in,
stories that may uplift us.

Perhaps you have a name for one, where you feel God trusted you
to provide respect and justice among people in a particular situation.

May be you would rather name a situation crying out fo help,
crying out for being granted God's wisdom and guidance:
in your own life, in the community you belong to, in your church,
or among people you are close to.

Gathering here today may bring up traces of God's wisdom in the
past months.

It may encourage us to make the right choice in what we would like
and what we need to ask from God.

It may encourage us to trust God's gift to us
in upcoming weeks of vacation or continuing daily routine.

The stories of faith from the ancient
as from the present time want to be continued.

God offers anew to inspire and to guide each one of us with his
invaluable wisdom and presence
whether you may - or you may not at all - expect it to happen!

Dare to take your choice – asking God what you need from God!
And: dare to look for God's responses as you image them -
as well as they may surprise you.

Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your
minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4,7). Amen