

I love it when this happens.

When the gospel lesson in our cycle of Sunday lectionary readings happens to speak exactly to whatever's going on in the parish.

Today is one of those days.

The lectionary powers-that-be scheduled this gospel reading from Matthew, decades ago,

and our parish leaders picked today as the Celebration Sunday

for our Joining Jesus Capital Campaign

not because of the readings,

but because it was a date on the calendar that worked.

We'd originally (as in way back before most of us had heard of COVID19) planned this for June 7.

I was supposed to be on sabbatical working at a peace and reconciliation center in Northern Ireland;

Donna and other wonderful leaders had plans well in hand for a celebration in church – I mean, really in the church building, with a reception Wilkinson Hall.

They were going to hand out pledge forms for the capital campaign to everyone.

There wouldn't have been a need to look if you got one in the mail (although I'm guessing that many of you watching did).

Or download the form from our Facebook page, website or one of this week's email blasts,

or pledge online on the link sent out in email this week

(all of which you can do).

No need to contact me or Donna to ask us to send you a pledge form, but of course we invite you to do just that.

The process has not been as straightforward as we'd like
(what has, these days?)
but even so, 27 of you – and counting – have managed to pledge.
Yes, 27 parishioners have made generous pledges to this campaign!
Thank you, and thanks be to God for you.

Now we ask that all of us join them to make a commitment as well.
And today's gospel lesson explains why.
(I told you I loved it when this happens.)
It's six quick parables.
The first five are all about describing what the kingdom of heaven,
God's realm, is like.

The kingdom of heaven is like a *mustard seed*, that smallest of seeds.
But lest you think it's a useless little scrub,
it grows big enough to make a home for God's winged creatures.

The kingdom of heaven is like *yeast* –
not only seemingly insignificant, but in that culture
(remember, unleavened bread) yeast is considered unclean, even evil.
Yet it is this humble ingredient that causes things to rise, to grow.

The kingdom of heaven is like a *buried treasure* –
hard to find but worth looking for.
It's like the *pearl of great value* –
worth giving up everything else for that one small, precious gift.

And, the kingdom of heaven is like a *net*,
cast far and wide to bring everyone together.

What do these five parables all tell us about the kingdom of heaven?
Oh, among other things...
that God's presence is closer than we think.
It's not pie in the sky out there,

but right here with us, tangible, in the stuff of this world.
God makes the ordinary, extraordinary.
Empowers ordinary people like us to do things we never dreamt possible.
Forgive more than we think we can bear.
Give more than we think we can spare.

In God's realm, the sum of the parts is *made greater by* the whole.
God brings abundance out of the humblest beginnings.

The presence of God may not be obvious to everyone, but it's there
unexpectedly sometimes, even in the toughest situations.
So often we need help finding it.

And that's what we're here for:
To help one another find and be found by God.
To help one another cultivate a growing sense of God with us here and now.
Like that tiny mustard seed needs planted.
That bread, kneaded.
The buried treasure, unearthed.
A pearl, cultured.
And maybe even like the skill of casting a net needs to be developed,
cultivated, to bring in the whole catch.

That's what this Joining Jesus Capital Campaign is about.
Inviting each of us to see God's presence among us, within us.
To acknowledge that each of us is vital and valuable.
Whatever seeds we plant, whatever gifts we offer,
whatever pledge we make and honor, will grow and help us all flourish.
No gift, no effort, *no one*, is insignificant.
Every one of us is needed to cultivate not only our own faith,
but this faith community
for the larger community we serve.

[DONNA]

The Joining Jesus committee has been working diligently for the past few months to cultivate our life together, our parish and our faith through this campaign.

As we've said before, this campaign looks so different than it did when we started.

The goal and the case underwent some important changes as our lives have changed so dramatically these past few months.

There are 4 parts of the campaign.

Accessibility: While accessibility to the physical church is the largest portion of the campaign focus,

like a reliable elevator and a ramp, we had to expand that to our digital accessibility.

We're looking at ways to enhance and continue our live streaming capabilities as we look down the road to when we will be together at church again.

Spiritual life: Enhancing our spiritual life includes strengthening our music capabilities through choral scholars,

giving the organ some TLC and maybe adding an organ scholar program.

And it's about fostering a youth mission opportunity for every child growing up at St. Paul's.

The endowment: Our endowment needs some strengthening to ensure our financial security and providing for the next generation of St. Paul's parishioners.

ECCT: And yes, we are supporting the ECCT with some of their efforts.

This campaign has not just been a drive to raise capital, it has been a learning experience.

So, what have we learned over the past few months? We need this campaign more than ever.

Not just the financial piece of it. We need that connection to each other – I've had some beautiful conversations with people.

People who I may have just passed in the hall on any given Sunday.

It's not just about the connection to our church, it's the connection to the CHURCH.

It's our connection to God and faith community for spiritual and moral support in times such as these.

The pandemic opened some doors that we didn't realize were there.

Like how much we need each other, especially when we can't be physically together.

Live streaming on YouTube gave us the ability to open our doors virtually and to reach beyond the physical walls of our building and will continue when we regather in our beautiful building.

It's about convenience and learning new ways to be at church together, wherever.

There have been changes to some financial situations.

The gifts we've received so far are precious and we realize it was a stretch for some to give.

Every bit helps. We need to hear from everyone, even if you can't pledge right now.

And while this is celebration Sunday, our work isn't over.

We will continue to reach out and make connections.

We need to plan and work to build our dream.

But we need the resources now in order to build that dream.

I said before that today's gospel has six quick parables.

But I only discussed five.

The sixth and last one? It's really more of a metaphor.

Jesus is talking about scribes, who usually get a pretty bad rap in the gospels.

But here Jesus recognizes their erudition in interpreting God's word and helping others see God at work in the world.

Scribes, says Jesus, are like people running a household who bring out their very best, the new and the old.

Isn't that exactly what Donna was talking about when making the case for our capital campaign?

Redefining accessibility as elevator and ramp (old), and

continuing online capabilities even when we're back in church (new).

Enhancing our spiritual lives through music from the most senior music lover to young choral and organ scholars.

Helping our children and youth learn the timeless truth of God's love by putting it into action in today's world.

Shoring up our endowment to make sure we pass all this down to those who come next.

Following Jesus of Nazareth,

now, in fresh and vital ways,

trusting God to lead us where we need to go.