

## Proper 26 Year A

There once was a great and good king of Crete who was loved and revered by his subjects. This good king lived a long life and his kingdom enjoyed peace and prosperity, took care of its poor, was a good neighbor to other kingdoms....but alas...as ever, all things must end...and the hour of the king's death had arrived. Just before death came, the king sent a servant to bring him a handful of earth, a memento, an artifact of his beloved Crete so that he may forever hold on to that which he treasured, that over which he had ruled and nurtured.

Death came and the king after traveling far awoke in an unfamiliar room. He could feel the earth still in his tightly clenched hand. An old man with kind eyes was with him, and the old man spoke: "Dear king the hour has come for you to enter the eternal paradise; it is time for your reward in heaven; but first you must let go of the earth that you hold in your hand." The king replied: I could never let go of my beloved Crete. It is all I have, all I am." So the old man left... and a million years passed.

After the million years a beautiful woman appeared to the king and spoke softly to him saying, "beloved it is time to enter the joy of eternity, you are missed; but first you must let go of the earth that you so tightly hold in your hand, but the king could not be persuaded...the woman vanished... and another million years passed.

The king beheld in his presence a small child plainly clothed and the child spoke and said, "good king...let go of the earth that you hold...take my hand and enter the kingdom prepared from the beginning....you are needed." The king looked at the loving outstretched hand of the child, and at the clod of earth in his own....His aching grip relaxed and the earth fell to the floor....the child led him to the door... opened it wide.....and there before the king's amazed eyes....bathed in golden sunlight.... was his beloved... Crete.

Dear people of God, when Jesus speaks of loosing in earth the things of heaven...he bids us as the good king was bidden to let go of that which we deem most precious.... loosing one's life Jesus calls it...he who loses his life will find it....we let go of what we think is ourselves, the kingdom of the self that we have constructed and served lo our many years...and we give ourselves, set our selves loose into the possibilities into which God calls us. We let go of that which impedes our life to give it over to the egalitarian community called the kingdom of God, a life not for us only, but a life for all...a life lived by a good king or queen, and that is a life that serves the greater good.

Today's Gospel is about giving ourselves to the world. The scribes and Pharisees are mere foils in the story to convict the disciples and the crowd, and us... to let go of a life of self-service and self-aggrandizement, and self interest, and to *do* in the world the teachings of scripture.... doing, not just believing a gospel life. This Gospel was written as you know in a dark time. The Temple, the center of Jewish life and identity had been destroyed...and Jews looked desperately for outward and visible ways to live as Jews, to claim their faltering identity. The Pharisees taught their followers many acts of piety that would identify one as a Jew, a citizen of Israel, old and new....We have been reading for several weeks now the theological banter concerning the Law, Jewish Law both civic and religious, the two are inseparable; we've heard arguments over Roman taxation, possibly the most explosive issue of Matthew's day....is this lawful, is that lawful ask the Pharisees, obsessed with the nuances that govern their common life, as they seek to entrap Jesus in the intricacies of Jewish teaching and legal lore....but Matthew points out that Israel's ultimate call is not for itself but for the world, for the neighbor, the widow, the orphan, the lame, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the stranger....the world entire....It is not about us...this business of salvation....salvation is about our wounded neighbor.

Matthew quite amazingly argues that it is in our doing Gospel work that we are taught the Gospel. He admonishes his disciples that they will not teach as the Pharisees teach...They will learn, as all will learn the so-called law by doing the law....and the law that trumps all other law, civic, theological or otherwise is love...love the higher law....would that our own penal system understand that, would that our government, Federal and State, all of our institutions would understand that.... It is God the true teacher manifest in our creative doing in the world. It is Christ the instructor who teaches us within the world of our doing....we learn just what compassion and mercy and kindness and justice mean when we are doing compassion, mercy, kindness and justice. These make no sense merely talked about.... they cannot be learned in a classroom, etched on a black board, white board, smart board....they are learned by our creative doing them. In our modern world that is counter-intuitive isn't it? Give me the plan, the formula, the answer, the "app"... that will take us nowhere... But ask a skilled carpenter or a skilled mason, or a skilled lawyer or doctor how they learned their art... and they will tell you that they've learned over many years of practice and that they are still learning.

The Greek word for doing, ποιου (poi-u), which is used repeatedly in this text today, may be translated equally well as... creating. In fact in the

creation story of the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture written most probably in Alexandria in the early second century B.C.E.... In the creation story this is the word for God's creating the cosmos. God *doing* light and truth; God doing the moon and the stars... God doing the heavens and the earth... doing order amidst the chaos... So this, our story today in Matthew yet again becomes a creation story. Our doing is an ordained calling to join God's own creative enterprise still creating the world... ours is to join the creation enterprise itself.... but first... first, we must let go of what binds us, what hinders us.... that which impedes.... our collective neurosis.... perhaps it is our need for control, or perhaps it is a fear of true freedom.... freedom that takes us beyond our routine day to day, freedom that crosses barriers and convention, freedom that takes us past where the sidewalk ends, out of the comfort zone.... and that takes courage... And know dear ones of God.... that what we think we might lose... we never had, and that for which we have forever yearned, we already have.... the true abundant life beacons us.... misses us.... needs us.... O good kings and queens of earth, made in the image of God, may we let go of whatever it is so tightly grasped in our aching hand, lay aside immaturity, as the ancient sages put it, and live into our godlikeness into the freedom for which we were made; that is where our own healing lies.... may we choose the kingdom of God for our dwelling, a life of creation.... a life of love.... Lives moving over the face of the deep as it was in the beginning transforming the aching order of things.... a life of creative action as simple and mere as Matthew will later tell us in this gospel... as simple as giving a drink of water, as simple as visiting the sick, of clothing the naked, as simple as attending to the lost ones who cross our paths.... mere acts of love that ramify beyond our knowing.... Love the highest law, Love the one law upon which hang all the others.... may we choose Love in whose likeness we are made. It is a choice we are privileged to make each and every day in mostly seemingly small ways.... may we choose the one life for which we are made that is so very near, as near as a choice.... and may it not take a million years.