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St. John's Episcopal Church
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Pentecost VIII (Proper 12 A, Matthew 13:31-33,44-52)

Well, that Old Testament lesson from Genesis was a bit jarring, wasn't it? Did you listen? A guy falls in love with the younger daughter of Laban; Laban agrees that if Jacob works for him for seven years, he'll give Rachel to him. Jacob works, Laban pulls a switcheroo, gives Jacob the *older* daughter, Leah, which, astonishingly, Jacob doesn't realize until the next morning. Jacob complains and Laban says he'll honor his original commitment after a week – and at the end of the week, Rachel belongs to Jacob.

Just one more example of a patriarchal system in which women are chattel. Property.

I didn't hear Jesus say, "The kingdom of heaven is like that place where men can give away their daughters." No, he didn't say that.

Instead, Jesus talked in parables about abundance. Abundance, treasure, the growth of faith likened to a mustard seed.

I don't think Jesus was much into patriarchy. He was much more into generosity, compassion, justice, and love.

Quite unlike the political scene we've witnessed over the past week.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you, St. Paul, for that reassurance.

Because the kingdom of God, perhaps most especially this week, has seemed so very far from my touch. A representative of the administration has used truly foul language on record, distracting us momentarily from the fear that millions of our brothers and sisters could find medical care so totally out of reach that they would face certain death. The dignity and courage of our transgender brothers and sisters have been dismissed by the top executive. The international image of our country continues to be tarnished beyond imagining.

And it makes me angry!

And it makes me wonder, "Will we *ever* see the kingdom of God?"

Martin Luther King, Jr., told us that the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.

But sometimes, like now, it seems to me that we're experiencing one step forward, then, *whammo, two steps back.*

We Christians understand that the Gospel is the pearl of great value. The hidden treasure. We cannot despair, we cannot give up, we cannot bend toward systems and institutions which deny the dignity of every human being, systems and institutions in which simple civility is

thrown out, women are assaulted, and people of color are victimized; systems and institutions which mock the very foundations of our history as a people.

Is this making America great again?

We must uncover the treasure, we must reveal the beauty of the pearl for all to see. We must let the light of the Gospel shine for those who live in darkness; we must let it dazzle those who have forgotten how to behave as reasonable and decent adults; we must remember that in Christ Jesus all things – even the promised kingdom – all things are possible.

And so we keep on aiming for the kingdom.

We keep on feeding hungry people.

We keep on working for healthcare for our least-favored brothers and sisters.

We keep on inviting people to wash their clothes for free.

We keep on helping people in the midst of a financial emergency.

We keep on visiting the sick, praying with those facing surgery, listening to those who mourn.

We keep on celebrating Christ's amazing, unconditional love in word, song, and sacrament.

And we keep on speaking up. Speaking up for those whose voices have no power. Speaking up for those who are far outside the margins. Speaking up for those who the powerful would like to silence.

Speaking the truth, speaking compassion, speaking love for our neighbor in the name of Christ.

We cannot abandon our hope, our faith, to the chaos of power. We cannot abandon those whose dignity is assaulted. We cannot abandon kindness, civility, mercy.

We cannot.

We come together as God's people to be reminded that we are loved. That God's Spirit dwells within us. That the image of God is implanted in our very DNA – and that the image of Christ lies just below the surface of every human being. Even those with whom we profoundly disagree and find deeply unlovable.

God will sort us all out in the end. The forces of evil will not succeed wherever there is even just a glimpse of light.

The kingdom of heaven is near. We just need to work really, really hard to make it a reality.

Amen.

