

St. Margaret's July 26, 2026

I Kings 3:5-12 Psalm 119: 19-26 Romans 8:26-39 Matthew 13:
31-33, 44-52

I am struck by a persistent theme throughout the Bible about the importance of wisdom, and the challenge of what is called discernment, to be able to find the path between right and wrong, good and evil. Over and over we find stories which reveal to us how important it is for us to learn humility, and to ask for the Lord's wisdom to dwell in us to guide us each day.

It seems the older we are, the more we realize how much we really do not understand! The complexity in life, in our world, in history and the cosmos, and in our own lives, challenges our understanding. Any sense that we might once have had as little children that we are able to control the world ~ is pushed further and further from us, the more experience we have.

On the one hand, as we age we can grow in a natural humility, as we begin to understand how little we really grasp on our own. But on the other hand, the choices life presses upon us continue to stretch our ability to make sense of it all, to feel we can make good choices.

All four of our readings today reflect or illustrate the importance of discernment.

Consider Solomon, who grew up as the son of the most highly renowned and respected King in all of Israel's history ~when the Lord asked what he would like as a gift from God, he confessed that he felt like a little child. In the midst of the tasks before him as he anticipated being the king, Solomon asked for God's wisdom to live in him. It's as though he was saying, "in every situation, every day, O Lord, I will lean upon you, above anything that my mind can perceive. I will try to follow you, Lord God, and serve you and your purposes in everything, every day. Perhaps this is the foundation to Biblical wisdom ~ to consider life as a journey in partnership with the Lord at every step..., and at every step to look for connection to the Lord for guidance, correction, insight, purpose.

The search for the Lord and his guidance along the pathways of life is illustrated in Ps 119. There we see the passion of our spiritual life in the image of someone working so hard and long that they are "panting" for the Lord.

This kind of devotion to listening to the Lord is needed in our world, in our lives, because of the very real threats, troubles, and sometimes evil~ which face us. You don't have to go very far from everyday temptations in your own life, or the daily "newsfeed" that streams past your consciousness, to feel almost overwhelmed with the challenge of simply being a good person!

In Romans 8, Paul uses the word "weakness" to describe our desperate need of help in choosing what is right.... and then acknowledges in humility and praise that the Spirit of God helps us ...because we do not even know how to pray as we ought! The world in all it's majesty and intricacy is forever offering us new opportunities ~ which reflect the goodness of God, **and** the challenge of choice!

Faced with the possibilities as well as the pitfalls and perils entangled in the endless choices we are called to make ~how glorious that the Holy Spirit is near, open to hear us as we whisper "help" ~ "help me find the right path, Lord"!"

To be made in the image and likeness of God is to become aware of the sharp difference between light and dark, good and evil; we are ever more aware of how desperately we need the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit to take our hand as we try to step forward!

The Bible never seems to flinch in revealing the weakness of powerful leaders, or pointing out the sins of God's people, Israel, or naming the evil which lurks ever close, as though waiting for an opportunity to trick us, to deceive us, to lead us astray. God is engaged in a battle with the powers of evil ~ which works to destroy God's good work in us and around us: The Lord gives us the ability to ask for & receive help in the Holy Spirit as we try day by day to choose the good.

This is why "discernment" is so pivotal: it is what Solomon asked for as a gift from God, the ability to "discern between good and evil" ~ in order to put into practice in his own life choices which align with God's good purposes.

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What do you think when you hear about "the Lord's judgment" ? Many people today only think of the question of whether or not they will "make the grade" for a "pass" to heaven ~ as they focus primarily

on their own sins and failings. But God is not like us! He focuses upon your need of correction~ yes, but WITHIN the framework of His Love for you as a precious daughter of son of God.

Most often in scripture, the people of God long for the judgement of the Lord to come because that will be the end of evil. God loves you, created in his image and likeness, as a parent loves their child ~ and overturns the works of evil which have been trying to trip you up, bring you down, sow fear and discouragement in your heart. Yet it is God who redeems, rescues, heals, and makes well, not just you... but the whole of creation.

This is the Biblical story ~ God's work to transform our world so that it reflects the Lord's original intention.

Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed... or like yeast in the dough. In both cases, our first glance at a mustard seed or at yeast reveals to us only a small thing slightly larger than a spec of dust. Yet in the parables, we are invited to grasp the **contrast**, between the insignificant beginnings, and the ultimate and overwhelmingly good fulfillment. The mustard seed grows into a large tree with many branches, supporting a whole ecology of life; yeast bonds with every spec of flour and gradually transforms the whole sticky pile of dough into something beautiful, nourishing, appealing and delicious ~ fresh bread!

We are to discern the difference between small beginnings and final fulfillment of God's purposes ~ and to recognize the sometimes slow or mysterious process from one to the other!

Jesus used many images to convey the hidden goodness of the Kingdom of God ~ the reign of God. We know we can only understand and grasp a small fraction of the wonder of God's love for us and for all creation. The images behind the word "good news" are all of wonderful transformation that takes our breath away. Think of ... announcing the end of the war, or being told that what was thought to be incurable cancer has somehow.... disappeared! The good news of God's reign over you is like that ~ takes your breath away in delight and joy!!

In the last of the parables in our Matthew story today, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a drag net, capturing every kind of thing from under the surface of the sea. Only when the net is pulled up is it possible for the fisherman to choose the good fish, and to throw the others back. Anything that causes harm, anything that frightens you

at night or in the middle of the day! ~ any evil that is intended to trip you up, to take advantage of you, to hurt you in your body or soul or spirit ~ all of that which is evil, God says will be dealt with "by his angels" at the close of the age.

I pause here to speak directly to those who wonder if they will ever feel acceptable to God. I know by experience that many people sincerely wonder whether they are included in the good news Jesus came to share. In response, I say that even asking the question in the quiet of your inner heart is a form of repentance, and expression of longing for God ~ evidence that God is at work in you through the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament says that salvation is "to know Jesus Christ"... and to try to follow him, to respond to God's purposes working to rescue ALL of creation.

Try to accept your doubts as the underside of faith. Don't allow yourself to be thrown off track by all your questions or doubts. Rather, put into practice what you have heard from Jesus and already know to be true of God's will for you. Trust God more than you trust yourself! Invest in the challenge of following Jesus rather than in worrying about your doubts!

In Romans 8, Paul says, "if God is for us (and He Is!) who can be against us?

Will not God who gave his son for US ALL not also give us All Things with Jesus?

Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

So when you think of "the judgement", hear Jesus say, "I love you ~ I'm looking for you ~ you are mine" The judgement of God is a promise that God's goodness will fill the earth as water fills the ocean, pushing away forever the evil that wants to destroy you. Judgement is Jesus answering the question "how often shall I forgive my brother or sister" with the words, "seventy times seven"! Judgement is Jesus saying to the man on the cross next to him, "this day you will be with me... in paradise."

Jesus created you, Jesus loves you, Jesus comes to rescue and redeem and restore you. He promises to remove all the powers that twist and destroy, that he will be with you forever and that his mission is to rescue the whole of his creation from sin and death.

The Kingdom of God is the active ruling presence of the Lord,
endowing you with grace and fulfillment and joy ~ and the creative
potential of God's purpose being accomplished in you and with you ~
forever.

In response to this Good News, we commit ourselves to follow Jesus,
rather than investing in our doubts and hesitations. God is bigger and
better than all we can ask or imagine.

~ let us pray~
AMEN