

# “Long Robes & Large Sums”

The Rev. Ryan Wiksell



November 10, 2024

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God.  
Amen.

- “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes.”
  - Look at me up here, in my long robe.
  - With my seat of honor.
  - Listen to me, praying my long prayers.
  - Don’t trust me. Don’t trust me with your soul anyway.
  - Trust God, and trust yourself.
- But we see the dichotomy that Jesus set up here in this Gospel
  - The culture said to trust the authorities. Long robes mean wisdom and integrity. Long prayers mean holiness and piety.
  - And the culture said not to trust the under-resourced.
  - They are probably poor for a reason, right? The rich have God’s favor, and the poor are experiencing God’s punishment.
  - Plus, they’re desperate. Desperate people are untrustworthy.
- So Jesus, like he often does, creates a reversal.
  - Don’t trust the rich. Be like the poor.
  - But even if we succeed at this reversal, we still have a problem.
  - We’re divided. We’re fully immersed in this illusion of separation.
  - As if there are two kinds of people. But there isn’t.
  - On that note, I have a story to tell you.

### **Parable: "Sorting Sands"**

In the beginning was a desert. Sand stretching as far as the eye can see--billions and billions of grains of sand all blending together into a muddy beige.

Each of those grains knew nothing except their togetherness. There was no "I am." Only, "we are." And this desert world had no form, no beauty, no variety. Just a sea of beige.

Until, that is, the Master Artist arrived, and began to separate the grains of sand into categories based on size, shape and color. After a time the grains began to see their distinctions. Some were large, and some small. Some were smooth and round and some were angular. Some were red, some were blue, some were yellow, some were purple.

Eventually the Artist finished the work, and the grains were all collected into their individual aesthetic groups. This was the moment they gained a sense of self--an identity--also known as an ego. "Look at those little blue grains over there!" the large red grains would shout. "They're not real sand like us!" And so it was that, in their differentiation and identity, the grains became self-absorbed and tribalistic, intolerant of all others and unable to understand anything outside themselves.

This is the human race, circa 2024. Differentiated into a splendid array of sizes, shapes and colors. Identified by our race, our gender, our class, our language, our ethnicity, our sexuality, our abilities and so much more. Our labels have given us a sense of self, in contrast with other humans. But they have also impaired our empathy, our curiosity, and our peace (both inner peace and outer peace.)

We are like those divided grains of sand. Fortunately, the story of the sand is not over.

Once the Master Artist had finished sorting the grains, the work of Creation was ready to begin. The Artist carefully and lovingly began placing the grains back into the now-sandless landscape, one by one. The grains were not always happy about it--many of them complained bitterly as they were pulled from their homogenous piles and placed alongside other grains that they didn't understand.

Just then, a bird flew across the scene, snatching up a few grains from the ground and flying high into the air. What those little grains witnessed from the air changed everything. A moment later, the bird dropped them to earth again, and they set about telling the other grains what they had seen.

"My fellow grains!" they said. "The Artist that sorted us is now forming us into a grand masterpiece! Whereas our colors were all muddled together in the beginning, now they are each playing a special role in a greater purpose. The large red grains, the small blue grains, the round yellow grains and the angular purple grains now flow together into an enormous Mosaic."

"What do you mean?" the other grains asked. "What are we a picture of?"

"The Master Artist!" the enlightened grains responded. "It is a self-portrait! Together we reflect the identity of the one who first gave us our identities."

We, as humans, are now enduring a period of historic polarization. Especially here in the United States, some would argue that we have never been more divided. But there is something new in the air. There is a movement to overcome these divisions--to transcend these walls--and find our essential unity again. Because this is what we were made for.

The universe began in absolute unity, and one day, perhaps millions or billions of years from now, we will find our unity again. But the end will not be like the beginning. At the beginning we were undifferentiated, blurred together into a single state of matter. Formless and void. Wild and waste. Unity meant nothing because there was nothing else there.

In the end we will find our unity again, but instead of a formless unity it will be a beautiful unity. Purposeful and diverse, full of intention and empathy and love.

Do you feel this change in the air? Do you see a new human movement, struggling to be born into the world? It's there, and it's growing. One by one, your friends and neighbors are finding beauty in the variations all around them, and choosing to move toward wholeness. Oneness. Love.

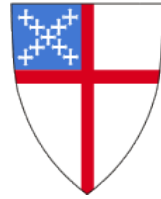
The Artist's masterpiece is forming all around you. Will you hear the call to take your place in the grand Mosaic?

- We're entering a new era.

- In our nation, and in our diocese.
- This new era is going to challenge our commitment to unity
- And challenge our appreciation of the beautiful variety of people all around us
- In our diocese, the challenge will be to rise to the occasion
  - To support our new incoming Bishop, The Very Rev. Amy Dafler Meaux
  - And to work together toward a vibrant future for West Missouri
- In our nation, the challenge is different.
  - Can we hold fast to what we believe while recognizing and honoring the diverse humanity in others?
- A few weeks ago we met with the twins' English teach for a Parent-Teacher Conference
  - And she told us about the work they're doing in reading comprehension
  - Asking questions about the characters in the story.
  - What motivated the main character to do this, or to do that?
  - And if the answer is too surface-level, to dig a little deeper
  - And try to understand, through character clues and plot and back-story, what is really going on in their mind and heart
- That is exactly what we need right now.
  - If we see a neighbor as an opponent, or an enemy
  - Let's look a level deeper, to understand their motivation
  - And if it still seems inhumane to us, to dig another level deeper still
  - Until we see ourselves in them
- It doesn't mean we won't oppose their platform. Or their choices. But we don't have to oppose our neighbor.
  - We are called to love our enemy until we have no more enemies
  - ...until we can look across the desert and see the beauty of the Mosaic the Master Artist is making out of us.
- Amen.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the  
**Sunday closest to November 9**

Proper 27  
Year B  
RCL



*Track 1*  
Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17  
Psalm 127  
Hebrews 9:24-28  
Mark 12:38-44

*or*      *Track 2*  
1 Kings 17:8-16  
Psalm 146  
Hebrews 9:24-28  
Mark 12:38-44

## The Collect

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Naomi her mother-in-law said to Ruth, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

## **The Psalm**

### **Psalm 127**

#### *Nisi Dominus*

- 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, \*  
their labor is in vain who build it.
- 2 Unless the LORD watches over the city, \*  
in vain the watchman keeps his vigil.
- 3 It is in vain that you rise so early and go to bed so late; \*  
vain, too, to eat the bread of toil,  
for he gives to his beloved sleep.
- 4 Children are a heritage from the LORD, \*  
and the fruit of the womb is a gift.
- 5 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior \*  
are the children of one's youth.
- 6 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them! \*  
he shall not be put to shame  
when he contends with his enemies in the gate.

## **The Epistle**

### **Hebrews 9:24-28**

Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

## The Gospel

### Mark 12:38-44

As Jesus taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”