

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 8A
July 26, 2020
Matthew 13:44-52

What the Kingdom of Heaven Is Like

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, . . . Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, . . ." (Matthew 13:44-45)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

The past two weeks, we've heard two of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven – the Sower whose seed fell on different kinds of soil, that is, the effect of the Word of God on those who hear it, and the Man who planted good seed, an enemy who sowed weed seeds on top of it, and the Man saying to leave them grow together until the harvest when the separation will take place. In both parables, it is clear that God, or Jesus, were the actors. They act for you and upon you, and you shall be gathered by Him into the place He has prepared for you. Their Word and work establishes and maintains the kingdom among us.

Today, Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Jesus is the man who found a treasure in the field. And that treasure is you. You are the hidden treasure for which He so joyously has given all things. "For the joy set before Him," declares the book of Hebrews, "[Christ] endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Jesus is the merchant who went looking for fine pearls. You are the pearl for which He sold everything. "[He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but He made Himself nothing" (Phil. 2:6-7). "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20)— not because the Creator of all things can't afford it, but because He voluntarily gave up all things, including all earthly comforts, in order to purchase you. "You are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23)— the very blood of Christ. What joy to know that Jesus thinks so much of you that He gave His everything for you so that you would be His.

As wonderful as that is, perhaps this way of reading these two parables comes as a bit of a surprise to you. Perhaps you have heard it said that Jesus is the treasure and pearl for which

you must give all things. It is true beyond all doubt that you must "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). But it is also true that, if you must first show this kind of love in order to secure for yourself the kingdom of heaven, you would be forever damned. By all means, Jesus requires that you be willing to sacrifice all things for Him: He declares, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25). But you also know that you love these other things way too much, and that you do not love Jesus nearly enough. Yes, the hymn is right: Jesus is a "priceless treasure, Fount of purest pleasure" (LSB 743.1), but how often and how willingly have you traded that priceless treasure for the rubbish of your own fleshly desires? How often do you prefer your treasures over Jesus and His Word? Would you really give them all up to have Jesus?

And while this is the traditional interpretation, if we hear these two parables as something we must do in order to secure the kingdom of heaven for ourselves, then we have in today's Gospel an intolerable demand from a god who ultimately must be loathed more than he is loved. If we read these two parables with ourselves as the actors, and with Christ as the treasure and pearl, we will be stripped of all confidence and certainty in our salvation, for we will never know if we have truly sold and sacrificed enough in order to obtain Him. If we read these parables in this way, we end up seeing our God, not as the one true God of unmerited grace toward us and superabundant love for us, but as a pagan god who must first be appeased by our actions before he gives us his benefits. If we read the parables of the hidden treasure and the costly pearl as something we must do, we will have ignored the pattern and example that Jesus Himself gave to us when He explained the first two parables in this chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

You see, when Jesus is the actor in the parables, your actions are removed from consideration. For the kingdom of heaven is Jesus purchasing you to be His own possession, "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Pet. 1:18-19). In other words, Jesus gave His all for you so that you could be His. And what makes this especially good news is seen in today's Old Testament reading where Moses is speaking to Israel shortly before they enter the holy land. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers." (Deut. 7:6-8). So there is nothing intrinsic in you that would make Jesus give His all for you. In yourself there is nothing so valuable as to move Jesus to do what He did. There is only His love for you and His desire that you live in His kingdom now and forever. For, after all, you are a sinful mess, totally corrupted by sin and destined for death and the devil. But out of His boundless love for you you now have great value.

This love that God has shown to you in Christ is His spontaneous act, unmoved and unmerited by anything anyone could first do for God. This love that God has shown to you in Christ freely

gives all things for all people, fully forgiving all of the world's sin so that you may know and never doubt that you indeed are fully forgiven of all things. This love that God has shown to you in Christ now has secured for you your eternal salvation. You are the hidden treasure and precious pearl that God loves so greatly that He has sacrificed all things, especially His own dear Son, our Lord Jesus. He now holds you securely— complete with a bill of sale that is marked, "It is finished" (John 19:30) and "Paid in full"— and, thus holding you, He shall not let you go. His love, His mercy, His grace in Christ makes you valuable to Him and “nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39). Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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