

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 13, 2017
The Gospel is our Greatest Treasure
St. Matthew 13:44-46
Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ,

Where do you store your most treasured possessions? Some people put them in a fire proof box in a closet. You may have a safety deposit box at the bank. Pirates used to bury their treasure. Wherever it may be, the place may well be a secret while allowing for easy access.

How do you determine your most precious possessions? There is sentimental value. You see families on the news fleeing from a wildfire taking only pictures and a few heirlooms. A possession may be of great monetary value in itself. In either case, such valuable possessions are things you would not want to lose, or be without.

Our Savior Jesus told many parables about the greatest value of the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said at one time to seek first the kingdom of God and the others things you need will follow. He reminded us that possessing all the world's wealth was not worth losing our souls in hell. Where your treasure is, Jesus said, there your heart will be also. We want the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, God's gracious rule of Christ in our hearts through the gospel as our greatest treasure.

The parables Jesus told on this subject may seem the same but each has a subtle difference. So, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price are not exactly the same lesson. Our great Savior and Teacher intended the two as complements.

The Gospel is our Greatest Treasure. It has great value. It is worthy giving up everything else.

In Jesus' day people often buried valuables in a field. They hid them this way because they were valuable. The man in the parable recognized the value of what he found, so he reburied it with great joy at his discovery of what had been unclaimed. He was able to purchase the land, and thus the valuable treasure also became his.

Jesus compared the value of Christ's rule in the heart through the gospel that creates and sustains faith to a treasure. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field." The comparison is between the kingdom of God and the treasure. We are not interested in how it became available. For whatever reason, the treasure was available to him. He appreciated the value and made the good choice to do what was necessary to make it his.

The parable of the hidden treasure is about the gospel's great value. What greater treasure could there be than the gospel of our forgiveness in Christ and the eternal salvation in heaven it gives? Is the gospel the first thing you take hold of in time of need? God considered his chosen people as his great treasure. He considers his church the same way. Our value is the Word of Christ. The kingdom of heaven includes not only the gospel but its saving activity and the result of creating the church.

The kingdom of God is the one thing we do not want to lose. The kingdom of God is the one thing we do not want to be without. We sing that God's Word is our great heritage. God has handed the Word down to us from our spiritual fathers. It will be ours forever unlike anything else. To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor because that is what the lost world needs more than anything else. When we will suddenly leave this world as God destroys it in the fires of judgment, the kingdom of God needs to be the one thing we possess to take with us.

The parable of the pearl is a bit different. It emphasizes not so much the value but the selling of everything to obtain it. Yes, it has a great value. But notice the point of comparison with the kingdom of God is not the pearl, like the hidden treasure, but the person who found it. "The kingdom of God is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Pearls were highly valued then as they are now. The disciples would have been familiar with this reality of Jesus' simile. That was one of the beautiful things about Jesus' parables. They brought his message into focus through the lens of everyday life.

Jesus' emphasis is the looking and looking and given up all. The merchant literally kept looking and looking until he found the pearl of great value. He did not give it a short, cursory glance around and not finding one of great value give up. And when he did find one, he gave up everything else to own it. So often people who are searching for spiritual truth and the assurance it brings are only "looky loos" who give up easily if they do not

find what they are looking for. Or, if they do find it, are not willing to pay the price to keep it and quickly lose their hold on the kingdom of God.

In both parables we see the value of the gospel and every effort not to let anything get in the way of possessing it. We see how valuing the kingdom God means paying the price of holding on to it. Finding the treasure and the pearl were life changing. The discovery gave great joy to the first man. The discovery moved the second man to place the pearl of great value above all else. The kingdom of God fills us with great joy in all circumstances. The kingdom of heaven, Christ's rule in our hearts moves us to sacrifice all to hold on to it. That includes giving up our love for sin, and the love for the things of this world. It means the treasure of our heart and the lustrous pearl to which we cling is Jesus Christ and nothing else.

Luther realized this when the Holy Spirit led him to see the righteousness of Christ for forgiveness and salvation. He was willing to give up everything else even his life if necessary for the sake of his new discovery. Were his enemies to take all he had, living and inanimate objects although gifts of God and dear to him, they would have won nothing because the kingdom would remain his forever and ever.

The gospel with its saving activity to bring lost souls like us and Clara into the church is our most valuable possession. God grant us the willingness to sacrifice all now that we have found it. Amen. <SDG>