

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value”

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July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:44-46

In the first parable we have a man working in a field. Maybe he’s hoeing weeds. The field doesn’t belong to him. He’s working for a landowner. Suddenly, however, he runs into buried treasure. Remember, 2000 years ago they didn’t have checking accounts or safe deposit boxes. Their money was kept in the form of cold, hard cash. So, it was not uncommon for someone to bury their wealth, and then die unexpectedly without telling anyone about it. To his great joy, this man has presumably bumped into one such treasure. He wasn’t looking for it, expecting it, praying for it. He stumbled into it. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like that.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is also like a merchant in search of fine pearls. He buys and sells pearls for a living. He knows pearls, and with a quick glance he can calculate their worth. He’s intent on finding one of great value and he goes on the hunt. After much searching and many disappointments, he finally finds that one pearl that knocks his socks off.

So, what do these two little parables teach us? First this: the kingdom of heaven comes by grace to those who are searching for it and to those who are not. Notice, both men find treasure. It happens to them. Their paths suddenly intersect with it whether seeking it or not. As Luther wrote in the Small Catechism, “The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer.”

Sometimes we think or are given the impression that we found Jesus and the kingdom of God. No, he comes to us and brings with him great treasure.

Think about the ministry of Jesus. Some of the people Jesus encounters are searching for the Kingdom, working very hard at their religion, not leaving it to accident or chance. I’m thinking of Simeon and Anna, who were always in the temple, worshipping, praying, fasting, waiting, watching. One day, unexpectedly, the infant Savior is brought to them, and they know their eyes have seen the Lord’s salvation. I’m thinking of John the Baptist, out there in the desert, working hard at his religion, living his ascetic life, preaching repentance, baptizing people. Jesus comes to him and the baptizer knows he’s not worthy even to untie the straps of his sandals. Nicodemus came by night to see Jesus, and Jesus tells him of a God who so loved him and all the world that he gave his only Son. Zacchaeus climbed a tree hoping to get a glimpse of Jesus. A little later that day, Jesus says to him, “Today, salvation has come to this house.” To these people who are searching for the Kingdom, Jesus comes carrying treasure.

Others, however, are not looking for Jesus or the kingdom of God. They’re busily engaged in their lives. Peter, Andrew, James, and John are fishing, Matthew is collecting taxes. Jesus comes to them and calls them. The Widow of Nain is burying her son and Jesus interrupts the procession with life-giving touch. Even Legion, a man possessed by many demons, living miserably among the tombs, shouting unintelligibly, cutting himself. Jesus comes to him and expels all the devils in him. To all these people who are **not** searching, the Kingdom comes.

The point is, it's by grace that God's kingdom comes. Whether we are searching or not, it's by grace that Jesus comes to us, with forgiveness, life and salvation. Jeremiah 29 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." But it also happens the other way. In John 15, Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Either way, it's by grace.

A newborn infant is not seeking God's Kingdom, but God's Kingdom comes to that infant through Holy Baptism. An adult convert may have struggled for decades to find meaning in life, and finally through the Gospel, God's Kingdom comes.

To those who are searching and to those who are not, God's Kingdom comes.

Second, when God's Kingdom comes, it causes a person to change how they think about the value of the things. In both parables, once these individuals encounter the true treasure, they rid themselves of everything for the sake of the one thing. The first one "in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." The second one "on finding the pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." They let nothing get in the way. They will pay any price. Nothings else matters compared to the one thing needed. Nothing else matters compared to the Treasure who is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So, the call to follow him changes the value we put on things. Stuff becomes less valuable; people become more valuable. We look at our house, or land, or car, or bank account, and we know that we don't really own these things. We are stewards of these things for a time. They are blessings from God, and we want to use them to bless others with them. When Jesus brought the kingdom to Zacchaeus, he said, "Look Lord, here and now I give half my wealth to the poor." Before, his wealth meant everything to Zacchaeus; now, not so much. Nicodemus, after the crucifixion, brought 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes. He was going to use his wealth to give Jesus the kind of burial fit for a king.

When the kingdom of God comes to us, it changes how we look at stuff and how we look at people. That life within the womb is no longer superfluous or disposable. It is a child created by God and therefore a life to be protected. An elderly person with severe Alzheimer's is one whom God will not forget, so we ought not forget him either. An individual doing time in jail is a person whom Christ counted worthy of his blood on the cross and is therefore worthy of our mercy too.

When the kingdom of God comes to us, it changes everything. Those of a different skin color, a different culture – if they are Christian, they are brothers and sisters. Actually, our relationship with them is thicker than blood. Entering the kingdom of God changes how we think about stuff, and how we think about people.

Finally, there is another way we can look at these parables. Think of these parables as a prism, and when you turn it, a completely different ray of light is revealed. So, let's turn the prism a little. Here's how it works. You are the buried treasure! You are the pearl of great value! And Jesus is the one that gave up everything for you! He did whatever it took to claim you as his own. He let nothing get in the way. Whatever the price, he was willing to pay it. 1 Peter 1, "You were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ" (v. 18). What a gracious God we have!

So, in summary, 1) God's kingdom comes by grace to those who are searching for it and to those who are not. 2) When God's kingdom comes it changes the value you put on stuff and the value you put on people. And 3) Jesus so treasured us, that on the cross he paid the highest price to claim us as his own. Thanks be to God! Amen.