



Lectionary 17, Year A

Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, Northwestern Ohio Synod

9th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Matthew 13:31-22, 44-52

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

³¹ [Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and reburied; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

SERMON TEXT:

You might have noticed that we are smack dab in the middle of the green season. We are in the Church Season of Pentecost. Though in some church traditions this long, green season is called Ordinary Time. And when we think of ordinary, words like plain, simple, modest, and humdrum come to mind.

In the most recent edition of *Living Lutheran*, my seminary classmate, Pr. Anna Madsen, writes that Ordinary Time is anything but ordinary. Ordinary Time is sacred time. A time for us to lean into God's gifts of pauses, practices, and habits. It's a sacred time when little rhythms add up over time to help us build a life of love and service.

Pastor Anna writes, ***"Think, for example of married life: ordinary, day-to-day interactions are what make a marriage thrive... or not. Or think of the way one treats one's own body: ordinary, day-to-day decisions over time impact one's level of wellbeing. Or think of the messages one hears from others and from oneself: these ordinary day-to-day signals about one's worth shapes one's sense of self"***. Thank you, Pastor Anna, for your wisdom and your encouragement for us to see Ordinary Time as habit-making time. A sacred time of small, simple habits upon which we can build a life of love and service.

This morning Jesus shares several brief parables with us. Short earthy parables that help us experience the presence of God in simple and ordinary ways. Now God's presence does not depend upon power and might but often comes quietly, humbly, and subversively through the gift of the Gospel. And when it is

suddenly discovered, the compelling call of Jesus is for us to go and to share God's great gift with the world. The treasure of Jesus crucified and risen is an extraordinary gift for an ordinary world. You see, God's kingdom does not depend upon the powers and principalities of this world but grows quietly through the gift of the Gospel. A gift that we are called to savor and to share.

And so, the kingdom of heaven comes to us... like a tiny, mustard seed that grows into a great shrub; like yeast mixed together with 3 measures of flour; like treasure hidden in a field; like a pearl of great price; like a net that when thrown into the sea gathers in every kind of fish; like a wise scribe who has been trained to share what is old and what is new.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew, chapter 13, Jesus shares 7 short and succinct parables about the kingdom of heaven. And 2 of these parables are about discovering treasure. The first is about a man who happens upon a treasure hidden in a field. ***"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and reburied; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."***

Then using a little-known Real Estate law. That'd be section 4, paragraph "8. eleven. B" of the revised code for you attorney and accountant types. It's in the fine print right there on line 4. ***"The finders-keepers/losers-weepers clause"***. That's the law that this man invokes as he buys the field that contains the treasure. In fact, the Scripture says that in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, to buy that field, that holds that treasure.

The other "treasure parable" is about a dealer of fine pearls, who upon discovering a pearl of great price also went, and sold all that he had, to buy that precious pearl. Here we have 2 parables. About 2 men. Who discover 2 treasures.

And let's be honest, we all know a thing or two about treasures. You've got yours and I've got mine. We are treasure laden folk. We've got homes and gardens. Cars and trucks. Laptops and cell phones. We have troves of treasure that over the years we've accumulated, purchased, inherited, borrowed, found. You might say that our lives are inundated with possessions, bounty, and treasure.

In our OT lesson, we read about King Solomon, who prays to God and asks, not for long life or for riches... but for wisdom. ***"Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people. Help me to discern between what is good and what is evil.*** And God is pleased by Solomon's request. And God says to Solomon, ***"Because you have asked for this and have not asked for long life, or for riches, or for the ruin of your enemies, but have asked for understanding to discern what is right, I will give you what you ask. I will give you a wise and discerning mind. And I will also give you what you did not ask for. Great riches and great honor".***

Solomon was wise and Solomon was wealthy, but I sometimes wonder what Solomon would think about all of our treasures and riches. Could Solomon even fathom an air-conditioned home. Or a big screen TV to watch Argentina win the World Cup. And cell phones that allow us to Facetime with the grandkids who are

miles and miles away. As Jesus once said, "**Something greater than Solomon is here.**"

Though I do wonder sometimes about the effect that our treasure may have upon our souls. And if we're honest and take the time to prayerfully reflect, I think that we'll come to realize that something's a miss. Because we don't seem to have the same joy that the man who bought the field so clearly has. We don't have the same blessed assurance of the pearl merchant. Knowing the great value of our treasures, you'd think that somehow, we'd make the connection between worldly and heavenly riches.

But we don't. Or we can't. Or we won't. In fact, it is often our treasures that keep us from experiencing the life that Jesus calls us to live. The accumulation of treasure doesn't always mean that the kingdom of heaven is near.

We had our 2 grandsons with us this past week, so we were up in the attic looking for some toys that they might enjoy. Specifically old sets of Legos that they could assemble. And while we were searching, I came across a small wooden box that I hadn't seen for many years. It was a box that I had when I was their age. And inside were a few treasured items. Marbles. Army men. Jacks. Real jacks. Not the plastic jacks they sell today. These were the real McCoy's. Metal jacks.

I was so pleased at finding this box of treasure, with the marbles, army men, and jacks, that my grandsons and I spent the evening shooting marbles, setting up the infantry, and "bouncin and grabbing", and "bouncin and grabbing". Now, you've all played jacks. Well, we played right up until bedtime.

In fact, early the next morning, as I was heading into the kitchen to make a cup of coffee, both of my bare feet experienced a couple of unexpected objects. Three to be exact. The 1st was cold, hard, and round. Marbles (3x), which rolled me into soldiers (3x), who then marched me in tight formation right over the grand finale. Jacks (3x). Ouch (3x).

Sometimes our treasures can be our travesties. Earthly treasures are not the same as heavenly treasures. Because heavenly treasure cannot be weighed, measured, or quantified. In the same way that love, mercy, and grace cannot be weighed, measured, or quantified. Though they do come to us at a great and noble cost. And that cost is a cross, and a Christ, and him crucified.

At the end of our Gospel lesson, Jesus asks, "**Have you understood all this?**" And they answer "**yes**", but the truth is probably not completely. For the kingdom of heaven remains quite the mystery. And yet, we know enough. At least enough to trust. That the smallest seed becomes a great shelter. That hidden yeast raises an entire loaf. That a secret treasure is worth everything. That a net can gather each and every... including you. That those who follow Jesus are inspired by the Holy Spirit to share old truths in new ways. So, when the kingdom of heaven finds you, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rest assured that you are treasured.

You see, the treasure of heaven never begins with us. Never has. Never will. The treasure of heaven begins with God... and is God. The greatest treasure is Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel. A God who lived among us. And died for us. And rises with the promise that though we die, yet shall we live.

Cross (3x). Risen (3x). Life (3x). Those are the treasures of God. The treasures of the Gospel of Jesus, crucified and risen for the world. And when the kingdom of heaven finds you, rest assured, that you are loved. You are cherished. You are treasured.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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