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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 10, 2016
8th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 28:10-22, Acts 16:22-33

Hymns: 758; 777; 779; 48:2 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:44-46

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Seeing just how blessed we are.

In this morning's bulletin there is a short notice reminding us that tomorrow a group of CLC members, many of them young people in their late teens, will be leaving the United States to go on a mission trip to India. Some of the older adult participants will be teaching at pastor seminars, while the younger participants will be teaching Vacation Bible School sessions in a variety of villages and cities in southeast India. These trips are great experiences for these young people. They find a real joy in participating in the

spread of the gospel, and in the work of advancing the kingdom of heaven.

When one talks with these mission helpers after their return one hears very much the same things; they express a new appreciation of the blessings we have. They realize just how fortunate we are to live in America, to have an abundance of food, safe running water in every home, comfortable homes that are made cool in the summer and warm in the winter. All these blessings that seem to simply come with living here in America, are truly appreciated. However, it is not only the material or temporal blessings that we possess for which they gain a new appreciation; they are brought to a greater appreciation of the spiritual blessings that we somehow simply take for granted as much as running water in our kitchens.

These mission helpers are brought to this renewed appreciation of the gospel for a couple of principle reasons. Traveling in India they see the evidence of the spiritual darkness that has ensnared so many millions of souls as the people of India bring their offerings to the many false gods of their Hindu religion. Then they also see how eager and receptive the Christians in India are to hearing the gospel.

This valuable lesson that these mission helpers learn by going on these mission trips is the same lesson that Jesus would teach us in the two brief parables that make up our text this morning.

THEME: The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl Reveal the Precious Nature of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus taught these parables to convey the truth about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is not only the presence of the gospel among us, but the presence of faith in that gospel so that the Lord rules our hearts according to that love revealed in the gospel. In the first of these two parables Jesus emphasizes that –

I. Your Place in the Kingdom of Heaven is as a Hidden Treasure.

Matthew 13:44 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Now it might appear that Jesus is saying that one might simply stumble across the gospel some day and rejoice at his good fortune. That is not the point of this parable. The point of this parable is focused on how precious a treasure this kingdom of heaven is in one's life.

Jesus taught this parable at a time in history when there weren't a lot of banks where just anyone might be able to deposit their money or keep precious things in a safe deposit box. People often kept precious possessions right in their homes, but then they might not feel that was so safe. Someone might break in and steal another's prized and precious possession. So it might be that an individual would find a good spot to bury one's treasure so others wouldn't know where it was, and so couldn't take it. Of course that inevitably leads to the happenstance that something goes wrong and the individual who buried the treasure isn't able to retrieve it, and a treasure hidden in a field will wait to be found by a complete stranger. That stranger needs to buy and possess that field! A Real treasure has come his way and he will spare no expense, stop at no sacrifice to take possession of that treasure.

That is the point Jesus would impress upon us. The kingdom of heaven is like that treasure. We ought to know that there is nothing so precious as possessing this treasure that God rules our hearts according to His grace. God has called us by the gospel to turn away from the vanity of this world, to take hold of eternal life, to know forgiveness and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, that is more precious than anything else we have in this life. It is more precious than **all** that we have in this life. To possess this gift of grace we ought to be like the man in the parable; we would spare no expense to maintain possession of this kingdom of heaven. There is no sacrifice too great, even as Luther expressed in his hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*: "And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, Let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won, The kingdom ours remaineth" (The Lutheran Hymnal 262:4).

Are we ready for that? Are we ready to sacrifice our goods? Our reputation? Our homes? Our spouse? Our own life for the kingdom? Down through the centuries many have. When Luther wrote these words it was a real possibility for him. This was not

only true for Luther and other theologians. Even some of the German princes prepared their families for the possibility that when they went to Augsburg to stand before the Emperor Charles they might not return alive. Possessing the truth of the gospel, possessing the treasure of the kingdom of heaven might have cost them their homes, their jobs, their lives. They were prepared for that sacrifice to possess the kingdom of heaven.

It is important for us to think on these things, to appreciate that the kingdom of heaven is worth that kind of sacrifice, whatever sacrifice might come our way. It is our greatest and truest treasure, for therein is eternal life.

Jesus' second parable concerning the kingdom reminds us that –

II. Your Place in the Kingdom of Heaven is Rare and Precious.

Matthew 13:45-46 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

The world doesn't recognize the beauty and perfection that is found in the gospel of Christ as our crucified and risen Savior. Indeed the world lives up to what the Apostle Paul wrote concerning its attitude toward the gospel; they see the cross as foolishness and a stumbling block. The world seeks after wisdom just as the merchant in the parable sought after pearls. The world would have us believe that true wisdom can be and indeed is found in every one of the world's religions.

We are told this so often by the world that it impacts **our** thinking about the kingdom of heaven. We start believing that what we have in the gospel is not something rare and special, but rather something quite common, and even mundane to the point of boring. There are so many other things in the world that attract us. It might be their beauty, or their entertainment value, or their claims to wisdom and social justice. Yes, it happens that children of God are misled into believing that there are matters of concern in this world that are more important than the kingdom of heaven. Children of God are deceived into believing that relative morality makes it impossible for us to identify some activities as being

sinful and dangerous to men's souls. As a result we may start to believe that there is righteousness in all men as long as they love. This is the kind of thinking that is gaining ground within the visible church and that makes the kingdom of heaven a common thing, something one might disregard, or neglect.

The kingdom of heaven is rare. One will not find it just anywhere. It is only to be found where that gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ crucified is preached. There the pearl of great price is found. There one will find something precious because it is unique, and perfect. It is unlike any other philosophy of this world which is merely a presentation of all that is supposedly righteous within man, but in the gospel **the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith** (Romans 1:17). And so the kingdom of heaven has come to you through others who have believed, for faith declares the wonders which God has done; and the kingdom of heaven grows.

The Kingdom of Heaven! Oftentimes this term is used interchangeably with the kingdom of God. Indeed, we find both used in the gospels. However, as we use the term as Jesus used it in the parables found in our text it stands in stark contrast with the **kingdom of this world**. And that really goes right to the point that Jesus would impress upon our hearts today. We can get so caught up in the matters of this world, and how important they are to our lives, or how precious they are, or how beautiful they are, or how wise and wonderful they are, that we lose sight of the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of this world is fatally flawed for it has been touched with the corruption of sin, and so this world and all that is in it shall pass away. The kingdom of heaven is God's perfect creation, the glory that He has won for us and has reserved for us for all eternity is in heaven. It is ours now, but shall not be fully appreciated until we leave this world and join our Savior in heaven. And so the kingdom of heaven is that hidden treasure revealed for us by God the Holy Spirit and it is our most priceless possession. It is that rare pearl that cannot be found anywhere apart from the gospel, and it is worth any sacrifice, even of our temporal life, that we might be included as citizens of His kingdom now and forevermore.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.