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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 9, 2020
10th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 3:5-12, Romans 8:28-30

Hymns: 477; 430:1,4,5; 366:1,2,5,7; 430:8

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 our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Teaching in Parables.

Jesus explained to the disciples that it was important for Him to teach in parables because of His audience. In His audience there were those who blasphemed the gospel, and sought to corrupt the true teaching of Jesus, twisting His words to suit their own ends. Jesus taught in parables so that they would not understand what He was teaching about the Kingdom of God. Instead of pondering the truths Jesus set forth they would dismiss His teachings as foolishness.

At the same time Jesus taught in parables for the benefit of His disciples, not just the twelve, but for the spiritual blessing of all who looked to Jesus for truth and salvation, both then and now. The parables were to help those who studied Jesus' word to come to a deeper comprehension of the truth about the nature of the Kingdom of God. These same parables also continue to serve as lessons easy to remember because they made a connection with daily life.

So it was that on the occasion recorded in our text Jesus was teaching some important lessons concerning the Kingdom of God in parables. We will focus our attention on two with a connected message. We do this with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide us in His truth to a deeper appreciation of --

THEME: God's Kingdom: The Most Precious Treasure of All!

We begin with the lesson of the first parable. The Kingdom of God is --

I. 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."

There are a number of shows on cable TV networks showing people searching for treasures, and often those treasures are hard to find. They are hidden deep in the ground, or far out to sea. The prospectors search, sometimes digging, sometimes blasting explosive charges and then digging through the dirt, sometimes washing great volumes of water over the dirt and catching what washes away. Sometimes they carefully dig under rocks and boulders that might fall on their heads. They search hoping to find a treasure, and when they find a small gem or a gold nugget, they rejoice. Often they are looking over their shoulders for fear that claim jumpers might be watching who would take away the little treasure they have discovered.

This is the foundation of the parable Jesus puts before us. The treasure people seek in the parable is a true and peaceful relationship with the divine, a divine they don't know. But they

search in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him. This is what the Apostle Paul explained to the people of Athens when they wanted to hear what his message was all about. Paul told them about the unknown God, and explained of God, “*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,*”²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:26-27) The people of the world search for God the Creator, but they cannot find Him. This treasure of a gracious relationship with the Lord of heaven and earth is hidden from them. They grope about in the darkness of unbelief, in the darkness of self-righteousness.

And then by all appearances they stumble on this treasure. Did they find the treasure, or did the Lord lead them to it. That matters a great deal, but first let us appreciate the moment of discovery, the EUREKA moment! It comes when the treasure is recognized for the great treasure it is. Immediately the response is to guard the treasure, and then do whatever it takes, whatever it costs to possess that treasure. How precious it is to know the God of all creation as the Redeemer who loves us with an everlasting love, who saves us from the darkness of sin and death.

This is the treasure of the Kingdom of God, the rule of God’s grace that has come to **you**, that has taken hold of your heart that you might “*know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.*” (John 17:3)

That is the moment faith takes hold of the heart of the sinner. It is not something conceived in the heart of man.

The Kingdom of God is --

II. A Treasure Revealed by the Lord in His Word.

The question is still asked time and again within American religious circles, “*Have you found the Lord?*” It really isn’t the time to reply with the smart remark of “I didn’t know the Lord was lost?” It is a fact and a dismal and sad fact that we were lost and condemned creatures. It is the Lord who found us. It is the Lord who in His grace selected us to be His own, and then called us by

the gospel. It is laid out for us in this morning's epistle lesson. *"Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."* ³⁰ *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."* (Romans 8:29-30)

It is God the Holy Spirit that works faith in the heart of man, the sin darkened heart of man, so that we see with eyes of faith the wonder of grace that has come to us in Christ Jesus, *"for God did not send His Son into the world to condemn that world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* (John 3:17) Jesus bore our sin in His body. He bore our sins to the cross of Calvary. That news is nonsense to the world, but to those who are called it is a message of grace and peace. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."* (2 Corinthians 5:19) Because Jesus shed His blood, the precious blood of the Son of God come in the flesh, our debt was paid. The curse of our sin was abolished once and for all.

We are told that to the Jew this gospel is a stumbling block. They stumble over it because they looked for a very different kind of Savior, one who would be more of a national hero. To the gentile, everybody else, people like us, this gospel of a propitiating sacrifice, a substitute dying in our place, well it just doesn't make sense; it's foolishness. By nature we conclude that people need to strive to make amends for their errors and be kind and good to others to appease God and achieve nirvana. That's what makes sense to the natural man.

So the truth of the parable is important for us to comprehend, the Kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field. We found it because, and only because the Holy Spirit revealed this treasure to us, and brought to us the realization that we are now *"sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 5:26) *By this grace we "are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints,"* (Ephesians 2:19) citizens in this Kingdom of God's grace.

How ought one to respond to such a revelation? That is presented so clearly in Jesus' parables. Faith responds with the realization that this is --

III. The One Treasure that Matters.

In the first parable the man that found the treasure hidden in the field, responded immediately. In great JOY he sold all that he had to buy the field. Nothing else mattered. Being included in the Kingdom of God by grace through faith in Jesus, that was it! Life was complete! The second parable reinforces this point. In this parable it is a merchant who knows that the pearl he has found is more precious than any other pearl he has ever encountered or will ever encounter. He knows this is the prize he must possess forever! All else is sold that he might possess it.

Plain and simple, that is how precious the gospel is for us. Plain and simple, that is how important it for us to be included in the Kingdom of God. Nothing else even comes close to being that important. Nothing! Ever! This is eternal life! Jesus “*is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*” (John 14:6) He is the only way to God! He is the only way to heaven. And that my friends in Christ is more than all one might attain in this material world, which is after all passing away.

But then this is the challenge for us in our daily walk during this earthly pilgrimage. The things of this world, the comforts and the sense of security that comes with a steady income and healthy bank account, the million dollar prize, they are all so enticing to the flesh, that the flesh overwhelms the spirit of the new man within us.

After a time we find ourselves taking the gospel for granted, and with it our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. We think we want this material existence, wealth and honor, and that the salvation purchased for us with Christ’s own blood will always be there. We may even neglect the Treasure of the kingdom in our pursuit of the material, or the pleasures of life. Sometimes we forget what it is that we really want. Recently in an episode of a TV show called *Alone* one of contestants after being alone for 45 days in the artic north came to the realization, “Everything I want, I already have!” But it was back in his humble home where his wife and son waited for his return. They were worth more to him than any million dollar prize.

Do you recognize that fact on an even greater scale? Sometimes it takes a trial in which our very survival is put to the test for us to recall the truth of the Kingdom of God. What we really want we, by the grace of God, already have! That is life and salvation in Christ Jesus. Remember the words of our epistle lesson this morning, how *“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28) Then the Apostle Paul went on to remind us of that the purpose of God is our eternal salvation!

We are so blessed in America that the challenges to our faith are nowhere near as extreme as are faced by Christians in other places in the world. In Nigeria 11,500 Christians have been slaughtered since 2015 when the government in Nigeria changed. Now it's open season on Christians. Christians may be killed with little or no repercussions. Buses are stopped on the highway, Christians sorted out and then killed. These are the ones who have shed their blood for the Lamb. You can read about that in this month's Lutheran Spokesman. In that same issue you may be introduced to one of our brother's in Christ in Bangladesh who truly has forfeited all for the Kingdom of God. Read of the trials and sacrifices made out of love and joy, the pure joy of being included in the kingdom of God.

May this awaken within us such a zeal for the Kingdom that has come to us underserving sinners. May the Spirit awaken within us that realization that God's Kingdom is indeed the most precious treasure of all!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)