

Matthew 13:44-52

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

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one very valuable pearl, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When the net was filled, they pulled it onto the shore. They sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹That is how it will be at the end of the world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous who are among them. ⁵⁰And they will throw the wicked into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ⁵¹Jesus said to them, “Did you understand all these things?”

They answered him, “Yes.”

⁵²He said to them, “Therefore every expert in the law who has been trained as a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure both new things and old things.”

Treasures

I.

What is it worth to you? What would you give up?

Back in the old days, people didn't have Simply Safe or Ring doorbells. You couldn't use your phone to log in to your cameras, or get an alert that motion was detected at any entrance point to your home. Unless someone was there 24/7 to stand guard, it was impossible to know if a thief might be approaching to relieve you of your valuables.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid again. In his joy, he goes away and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44, EHV). Why would there be a treasure hidden in a field in the first place?

Back in the days of Jesus, rather than keeping all your valuables in the house where thieves might break in and steal, people often buried their treasure. At least, some of it.

This makes me think of a former member of mine. He had become risk averse. His whole upbringing made him that way. His parents had lost everything in the bank failures of the Great Depression.

Mike learned all he knew about finances from them. Pay cash. For everything. Always.

Now, I might *say* I pay cash, but I don't mean it quite so literally. For many, if not most, purchases, I'll use a credit card. My concept of paying cash is that when the bill comes in from the credit card company, the balance is paid in full every single month. I've paid cash—and earned a few bonus points from my card in the process.

Not Mike. The only reason he ever used a checking account was to pay the employees of his business. Mike traveled a lot to procure merchandise. Since he put many miles every year on his vehicle, about every three years he would buy a new one. The dealership would be alerted ahead of time because he would be coming in with a literal briefcase full of cash.

He didn't ever want credit for his donations to church, so he threw them into the offering plate loose—no envelope for him, and certainly no electronic giving. He didn't want a giving statement, but the counters duly recorded his offering anyway. No one else would throw multiple \$100 bills loose into the offering plate.

Where he kept all this cash I have no idea. Perhaps he had a safe—or several—at his house.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one very valuable pearl, he went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46, EHV).

Valuable jewels were smaller and easier to conceal than the gold or silver or copper that served as currency back then. An alternative to burying all that gold or silver in the field was to invest in expensive jewels. They could be securely stored and hidden more easily.

Of course, the problem with hiding treasure, whether large or small caches of treasure, is that often no one would know where it was kept for safe keeping. If something happened to the one person who knew, the treasure was lost.

Did Mike bury some of his cash? I don’t know. Did the family know of all his secret locations in case anything ever happened to him? He never talked about that with me. I hope they knew.

These first two parables in today’s Gospel speak about unspeakably great treasures. Out in the field, the finder carefully followed the “leave no trace” advice and left everything the way he found it until he could sell everything else he had and purchase the field. The man finding one pearl of great price did the same. Nothing was left on the shelves or held back as too valuable to give up when an immense treasure was available.

II.

Some questions come to mind. Does anyone bury treasure like that and just walk away willingly? I forget where I put things sometimes, but something so valuable deserves a special spot—and careful notes to make sure it can be found again.

Today’s theme of the day began: “The Christian seeks spiritual wealth.”

The treasure in the field and the pearl in Jesus’ parables do not refer to things you have to sell everything you have to acquire. You already have the treasure. The treasure is Jesus and the forgiveness he won for you on the cross. Salvation is a priceless treasure, but you didn’t even have to pay for it—the Holy Spirit gave it to you as a free gift.

Why, then, would anyone walk away?

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When the net was filled, they pulled it onto the shore. They sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw the bad ones away” (Matthew 13:47-48, EHV). How does the dragnet relate to the parables of the treasure in a field and the treasure of a priceless pearl?

“That is how it will be at the end of the world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous who are among them. ⁵⁰And they will throw the wicked into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49-50, EHV).

So many walk away from the greatest treasure. They come up with so many other priorities. Some of them are sinful lifestyle priorities, like drugs and alcohol or sexual misconduct. Many are not bad things at all—family and friends, a good job, making sure they are financially secure, recreation, health; those things are by no means sinful.

But what is the top priority? Today’s theme of the day concluded: “The Christian seeks first spiritual wealth and will sacrifice anything to obtain it.”

It’s so easy to look at that sentence and nod your head. Of *course* spiritual wealth is my top priority! Of *course* I will sacrifice anything to obtain it and maintain it.

But when the rubber meets the road and your friends or family ridicule you because of

where you go to church, what's your response? To cave? To go to a different church—perhaps one that isn't so strictly adherent to the Word of God? When the rubber meets the road and some other church makes you "feel good" when you go there, do you ignore the fact that they don't really mention sin and grace all that much—or at all? When the rubber meets the road and your lifestyle choices are condemned in Scripture, do you just find Christianity to be unpalatable and abandon it altogether?

III.

"⁵¹Jesus said to them, 'Did you understand all these things?' They answered him, 'Yes'" (Matthew 13:51, EHV).

Did they, really? Perhaps so. Remember from last week one of the purposes Jesus had of speaking in parables: to confuse those who really didn't want to understand while at the same time making a valuable point for those who *did* want to understand.

Perhaps they really *did* grasp these new insights into the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps they realized that Jesus really *was* the treasure and the pearl—some One to hang on to for dear life, because he gave them eternal life.

IV.

"He said to them, 'Therefore every expert in the law who has been trained as a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure both new things and old things'" (Matthew 13:52, EHV).

At the time Jesus taught his disciples an "expert in the law" was someone who knew well the Old Testament and the promises that pointed ahead to Jesus. Such an expert who was taught by Jesus becomes "a disciple in the kingdom of heaven."

Someone taught by Jesus is uniquely qualified to tell others about these treasures. The Bible has lots of treasures. You don't have to dig around in a field to find them. You don't have to rummage around jewelry stores or antique shops to find that one item that is priceless. It's right there to be mined.

My daily devotions are from a book called "Treasures Old and New." Each day there's a little gem from the Old Testament and another from the New. They loosely follow the church year, so this week there was a parallel account of today's First Reading about Solomon. You may or may not need more vocabulary hints for the words than are listed under the Bible passage. Sometimes I do, too.

Maybe you won't mine the treasures each day in the Hebrew and Greek, but mine them none-the-less. Though the treasure of faith is yours, there is never a lack of things to keep learning. That training equips you for Christian living and Christian service.

Today we install a new teacher. You don't have to be a called worker to dispense treasures old and new. You are a disciple of Christ. You have learned at the feet of Jesus. As you keep learning throughout your life, you are constantly preparing to share the treasure with others. You are the owner of the house—one who has the treasure of faith. Bring out things old and new. Share the message of sin and grace.

One thing is to top your list of priorities: faith. Your financial picture may or may not be affected as you maintain your faith. Recreation may have to take a backseat as you set sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear his Word above so many recreational opportunities that vie for your time and attention. As for family, I pray that your family understands that your Savior comes first in your life.

After all, the Christian seeks spiritual wealth—the real treasure. Amen.