

## SERMON ON Matthew 13:44-52

26 July 2020

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Five letters and two numbers currently seem to rule our lives. COVID19.

This pandemic has shown us how something so small in size that is invisible to the eye can grow rapidly and exponentially into a destructive force that consumes all our attention and resources, as individuals, communities, nations, and as a world.

How amazing that our Gospel text for today presents parables which offer counter-images to this destructive force. The parables describe how the kingdom of heaven emerges from something almost invisible to the eye and grows exponentially, offering us sustenance, a treasure worthy of all our attention and resources.

The two parables in 13:31-33 both draw attention to remarkable growth arising from insignificant beginnings.

Our Gospel text today from Matthew has Jesus telling 4 parables about the kingdom of heaven. I want to focus particularly on the two contained in verses 44-45 – the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl.

There is a well-known hymn which I love and it is titled “The Church’s one foundation.”

In particular the last four lines of the first verse is what has always moved me deeply. It reads:

From heaven he came and sought her

to be his holy bride;

with his own blood he bought her,

and for her life he died.

I refer to this hymn because for me, in a sense, it captures what I believe God has placed on my heart to share with you.

Barbara Richmond, in her work titled Jewish insights into the new testament argues that these two parables have suffered significant misinterpretation over the years. She points to usual commentaries that identify Jesus Christ as the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. She continues to add that religious writers who subscribe to this understanding say that as we go through life we are the people who one fine day discover Him (Jesus), sell all we have, give it all up and “buy” him at any cost.

She then beckons her readers to consider this as false and a misinterpretation. She argues, and in my study of scripture, rightfully so, that never in scripture is salvation offered as something we have to buy or can buy. Not one of us can ever give all that one has in order to purchase salvation and a relationship with Jesus Christ for we have nothing to give in the first place! Salvation is a gift of grace that is received by faith. We have no way to earn it.

Having said that, there is a sacrifice we do make as God's children and followers of Christ. It is the giving up of our life lived apart from God. Put another way it is the giving up of our independence and our desire to have things our way. We do this in order to be under God's reign. The kingdom of God is the rule of God, the reign of God and the people of God. There are those who accept the reign of God in their lives and there those who oppose the reign of God in their lives.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son we encounter the son who chose to be completely independent of his family and who chose to reject the rule of his father. He returned home when he was willing to stop saying "I want my way."

In Philippians 3:8, Paul tells us what he considers as most valuable: Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.

Beloved, are we able to echo Paul's words?

Look at the parables again and you will notice a recurring word – it is the word "bought" which is the past tense of the word buy. The greek word used in this case means "to buy; redeem, acquire by a ransom or price paid"

It is the same root word that is used in passages like 1 Cor 6:20 and 7:23 which reads "For you were bought with a price"

The great treasure then that God values in the world is the church. It is the treasure for which Jesus gave all that he had – his very life.

The church is you and I. We are that treasure that Jesus paid a costly price for – the cost of his life.

One's "treasure" is an important metaphor in Matthew indicating where one's allegiance ultimately lies and its nature. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Our allegiance should be to Christ and also to our family. To whom and to what are we giving our allegiance to? What and who is the treasure we hold most dear in our lives?

Now to the pearl. Why did Jesus not use the diamond or the ruby which are regarded as precious stones? A pearl was not accorded the state of precious stones in Hebrew mentality.

Pearls are produced by a creature the Law considered as unclean. A pearl is the response of an oyster to something which causes it injury. A pearl grows out of hurt. A minute particle of sand gets into the oyster, constantly irritating and the oyster has no way to rid itself of this aggravation except to transform the thing that is injuring it.

Isn't this a remarkable picture of the church? Just as the oyster transforms something hurtful and foreign into something as beautiful as a pearl, so the Lord Jesus took the sin of the whole world, and by His suffering, by giving all that he had, by paying the ransom price, He transformed us into his family, and makes of us something beautiful and priceless.

We are the treasure and we are the pearl which Jesus bought at a great price because of God's great love and his desire to have an intimate relationship (ginosko) with each and every one of us.

Beloved, Jesus takes our hurts and our brokenness, our burdens, pains and distresses and he takes it upon himself. There is an exchange – as he takes our sins, our brokenness and our pains and burdens he offers us the priceless gift of his peace and a life lived in relationship with God.

He calls us to respond. What will our response be? Will we make him our hearts treasure and live our lives in allegiance to him who gave his all? May God bless you all. AMEN.