

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 21, 2011
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 13:44-52

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.
"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.
"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." (NIV)*

If you are a fan of the *History Channel* or *A & E*, perhaps you've seen some of the more popular reality shows where people hope to have or to gain possession of some hidden treasures. On one show people will bring all kinds of things into this pawn shop believing they have some unique antique or costly item. They are hoping for an expert to tell them that they have a very valuable item, a rare gem, that is worth a lot of money. Another show has people bidding on storage units. They get a quick glimpse inside and then the storage locker goes to the highest bidder who, of course, is hoping to find something with a lot of value in it. They will buy the unit and then search it with anticipation that they come across some great treasure.

And when we hear the word treasure, aren't those the types of things we think of - things worth a lot of money, things of tremendous value? When I hear treasure the first thing that pops into my mind is a big chest filled with gold, or diamonds, or precious rubies. That's why Jesus teaches us a few lessons once again today in parables. He wants us to turn our eyes away from the physical and put them onto the spiritual. He wants our hearts to turn away from being set on earth things, and instead set out hearts on things above. His words encourage us to focus not so much on temporal goods, but on the eternal gospel. Jesus would have us heed the words of Paul as he writes: **"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."** (1 Corinthians 4) It is my prayer that Jesus opens our eyes & hearts today and everyday to - **A Treasure That Is Worth It All!**

This whole chapter is Jesus teaching one parable after another - four so far, and now we have three more. The first two in our text are similar: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."* There were not big banks or stock

markets or 401K saving plans back in Jesus' day. So it was pretty common for wealthy people to divide up all their wealth into thirds. One third would be used to live on, another third people would use to invest in precious stones or jewels so if they had to flee quickly they would take it with them, and a final third they would bury hoping to come and reclaim it one day when they returned home. But sometimes people did not return and their treasure remained buried without anyone knowing the place it remained.

This is what the man in Jesus' first parable comes across - a treasure hidden in a field. When he finds it he hides it again and filled with joy goes and takes all he has and sells it so he can buy the field with the buried treasure. He recognized that treasure was of greater value than all he had. The same thing with the merchant who spent his life looking for the perfect pearl. When he finds that pearl of great worth he isn't about to let it go. He too goes out and sells all that he has and purchases the pearl he had hoped to find.

Jesus tells us the kingdom of heaven is like this - a treasure buried in a field - a pearl of great worth. The kingdom of heaven is a treasure that's worth it all. It is worth getting rid of everything else for - and then some! After all, ***“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Matthew 16) Whether people admit it or not, every person has in them a gapping hole, an emptiness in their lives that comes because of sin. Because sin separates from God, from our Creator, it leaves something lacking in our very existence. It leaves people searching and wandering with a spiritual restlessness. People all over try to fill that emptiness, that huge hole, but it can't be filled with anything but one thing. That is the good news, the Gospel of Jesus. Only Jesus can truly fill that hole in a person's heart. Only the Savior, whose death on the cross paid for our many sins, can take away the guilt and bring true peace. Only Jesus can bring the sinner back to God and give salvation.

This is the treasure that's worth it all. To know Jesus' love and forgiveness it would be well worth it to run out and sell all the rest of our things. My friends in Christ, do we need this reminder again this morning? Are our priorities in line with these two parables? Do we rank our spiritual blessings in a place much higher than our physical blessings where they belong? Or does our time and energy and priorities too often focus on the physical and ignore the more important spiritual? Do all our things ever stand in the way of our greatest treasure?

A missionary from Africa once told me how monkey's are caught. They will take a tree and make a hole in it just large enough for a monkey to get his hand into it and then will stick a banana into the hole in the tree. The monkey will grab the banana but he will not be able to get his hand out while holding the banana. If the monkey just let go he would be able to escape, but the monkey will not let go of that banana he wants for lunch and it gets caught. How foolish to give up your freedom because the monkey will not give up the banana! But that is exactly what Satan is trying to do to each of us. He wants us to hold onto our money, or jobs, or sports activities, or whatever the things we consider valuable here on earth, so tightly that we lose focus of more important things. The devil wants us to hold on so tight to our earthly life that we lose sight of our eternal life. He wants us to lose our freedom and the forgiveness we have in Christ.

For what we have is the greatest treasure - it is worth it all. We have this treasure not because we found it on our own or because we had to purchase it with all we had. Instead, God brought this treasure to us freely and fully. He brought it to us in a baby laid in a manger in Bethlehem, in a humble servant who obeyed every one of God's laws in our place, in a suffering servant who went to a cross and shed His own blood to pay for all our mixed up priorities and every other sin. God brought us this treasure when He raised Jesus from the dead. He made this treasure yours and mine when the Holy Spirit came to us through water and the Word in baptism. With His good news the Lord gave us something greater than all the gold in the world when He said to us and still says: *"Take heart, your sins are forgiven."*

And in Jesus' third parable we have a reminder that even in the church on earth not everyone sees the true value of this priceless treasure. Jesus uses a picture that people who lived by the sea of Galilee would know well - fishermen bringing in a net filled with fish. In that net they would pull up what they were looking for but also a bunch of species they were not fishing for would be caught. On shore they would separate them by keeping the good fish and throwing out the worthless fish. So it is with the Gospel cast out into the world. It will catch all kinds of people including hypocrites - people in the church who do not really believe in Jesus as their Savior. Jesus explains: *"This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* There really is an eternal hell and all who do not believe will be condemned! On the last day, there will only be one treasure that will have any value at all.

And now Jesus asks the disciples if they understand these parables about the kingdom of heaven. They do and that is why Jesus taught them parables - to give them a greater understanding about the kingdom of God. *He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."* Jesus' disciples are like a master whose storeroom is so well stocked that he is equipped to meet every situation. The disciples had countless treasures at their disposal. They had Old Testament truths and Jesus was giving them new treasures to take into the world. We have the same treasures in God's Word. The best part is they never run out. We don't have to worry about sharing them too much as if there will not be enough left for us. I pray we keep learning God's truths so we can disperse these gospel treasures to others. When we tell others about Jesus we share a treasure more valuable than anything else.

So when I say the word treasure, from now on I pray we think of things far greater than what we might find in a storage unit and far more valuable than gold or diamonds or precious rubies. When we hear treasure, I pray the first thing that pops into our minds are things such as - the cross - the empty tomb - the life in heaven that awaits us. This last week I was informed that the grandfather of one of our members was very sick. In fact, they called all the family to the hospital thinking his last day here on earth had come. As the family was there I was told there was someone who kept crying at his side and he kept shaking his head as if to say no. He was saying not to cry as he kept pointing to a cross. He will be alright and safe in His Savior's arms. Because of Jesus he knows where he is going. That, my friends, is a treasure of tremendous value, a treasure above

all others, the only treasure that in the end really matters. That is a treasure that's worth it all! Amen.