

Treasuring Christ Together

Matthew 13:45, Pentecost 8

Proper 12-A, July 30, 2017

Two American television programs that have aired quite successfully in this second decade of the 21st Century are: (1) The “Antiques Roadshow,” and (2) “Storage Wars.”

“**Antiques Roadshow**” is based on a British program with that same title. On this program, **antique owners bring their items to be appraised by experts on the program**; with the **American show** being hosted each week by the well-known gameshow host and television celebrity **Mark Walberg**. Sometimes--the **guests on the program are wonderfully surprised to discover** that the item they brought with them **is far more valuable than they ever dreamed possible!**

But on the other hand, some guests become totally deflated when they discover that their “so-called” family heirloom, **prized so highly prized--and passed down for three generations--is only a “knockoff”** of an original; hardly worth anything at all!

The second program “Storage Wars” is filmed in sunny California, centered around those **climate controlled storage rooms that people can rent here** at such places as “**Extra Space Storage**” in Columbia or as “**Stay Lock Storage**” in Chapin. When the renter of these storage rooms has defaulted on their payments for three months, California State Law allows for **these storage rooms to be auctioned off as a single lot of items to the highest bidder.**

The show follows professional buyers who are willing to bid on the contents of each storage room, even though they have only allowed to look inside these storage rooms for 5 minutes from the outside before the auction begins. The goal, of course, is to turn a profit on the merchandise.

But, let’s face it! It’s still a guessing game at best and always like buying a pig-in-a-poke! It’s a very **risky business with no guarantees!** **If** you aren’t careful--you could really end up losing your shirt!

But in these two little parables--that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ speaks to us in our Gospel lesson today--**he speaks to us about two different people who are given the opportunity to make the trade-off of a lifetime--absolutely convinced--that the opportunity each person is faced with is 100% totally risk free!**

JESUS’ POINT IS THAT THE GOSPEL IS A VALUE THAT ECLIPSES EVERYTHING IN THE LIFE OF A TRUE BELIEVER (vv. 44-46)!

The first is the parable of the hidden treasure and the second is the parable of the pearl of great price. Both parables turn on the **DISCOVERY OF SOMETHING VALUABLE** and **both show SOME EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS TAKING PLACE IN RESPONSE TO WHAT IS FOUND!**

In the first parable, we find Jesus comparing the kingdom of heaven to a treasure that is hidden in a field. One day a man, who is working the land--but is obviously not the owner, **discovers a treasure--and then he covers it back up!**

In that first century world--**precious items and even money--were often buried in secret locations for one’s personal protection and for one’s safekeeping!** The possibility of an invading army, thieves, and the absence of federally-insured banks like we have in the USA today, caused people to hide a lot of their jewelry and other valuable resources in the ground.

Sometimes the person who buried the treasure in the ground may have died without ever having informed any of his loved ones that he even had a family treasure chest buried in the backyard! It some respects, the effects today might be the same for a man’s family if he dies without having a will.

Now I know that some of you might also be worried about the ethics of a man who presumably works for another man without telling the owner of the field--what it was exactly that he found!

But let's keep in mind here the reminder that the parables of Jesus only have one main point to them, and **Jesus is not making an ethical point here**. But in defense of this man, please note also that the man doesn't simply steal that treasure chest--which he could have easily done also! Instead this man takes actions to purchase the field so that he might acquire that treasure chest legally as the lawful owner!

BUT FOR THIS MAN THIS IS NOT A GUESSING GAME! THIS IS NOT LIKE BIDDING ON A CLIMATE CONTROLLED STORAGE ROOM--UNCERTAIN OF THE CONTENTS AND THE VALUE! -- THE REAL MOTIVATION BEHIND EVERYTHING THIS MAN DOES--IS PURE AND SIMPLE JOY! In verse 44, Jesus tells us: "THEN IN HIS JOY HE GOES AND SELLS ALL THAT HE HAS TO BUY THE FIELD!"

Please note in this verse the critical role which JOY plays here!

JOY IS NOT THE FRUIT OF THIS MAN'S ACTIONS--JOY IS THE ROOT OF HIS ACTIONS! May I please say that again? **JOY IS NOT THE FRUIT OF THIS MAN'S ACTIONS--JOY IS THE ROOT OF HIS ACTIONS!**

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field that a man finds, who in his joy covers it up and goes and sells all that he has to purchase that field!"

The good news of God's love for every human being in the gift of his Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ--would be worth any price that we could ever pay--to hear it and believe it! And yet the point of these parables is not that GOD'S FAVOR AND MERCY IS SOMETHING THAT WE COULD EVER POSSESS WITH RESOURCES OF OUR OWN.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith! This was to show God's righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:23-26)!

We have no righteousness of our own, in any way, whatsoever, that we could ever hold up before our God! Isaiah even goes so far to tell us in Isaiah 64:4, **"All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags in the sight of God."** *Even the good things we do are oftentimes tainted with sin and not done with totally unselfish motives!*

But to be awakened out of spiritual death and to be born again into God's kingdom through the waters of our Baptism! To be born again in the hearing of the Good News and through the quickening power of the Holy Spirit! Such news and such a personal conviction brings to a human being GREAT JOY!

And yet the offer is always a matter of God's grace: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, this is not your own doing! It is the gift of God, not because of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9)!*

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who finding one of great value, goes and sells all that he has to buy that pearl!"

Pearls were extremely valuable in the ancient world and have been treasured and traded for several thousand years. While most of pearls in the ancient world have been harvested from **oysters**; **oysters in both fresh and salt water, pearls have also been harvested from other shellfish like clams, mollusks, mussels and abalones too!**

To my amazement, I discovered in preparation for my message today that the largest pearl ever harvested from the sea is a pearl that was extracted from an extremely large clam by a diver in the ocean waters of the Philippines in 1934; a pearl that weighed 14 pounds and not too long afterwards was valued at some \$10 million.

Most jewelers today will tell you that a pearl is classified as being a gemstone--but as a gemstone--or a "gem" for short--a pearl is in a class uniquely its own for two important reasons!

First, the pearl is in a class by itself because it is the only gemstone that comes to us from within the body of a living creature!

If the pearl is a symbol for our eternal salvation--let's never forget that our eternal salvation was harvested too, **not from within the body of another living creature like an oyster, or even from within the body of another sinful human being like you and like me! For Jesus Christ was not created but begotten, true God begotten of his Father from eternity and true Man born of the Virgin Mary--without sin!**

Our salvation was harvested from within the body--of the Perfect Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who died on the cross in payment of our sins and was raised again to assure us that God the Father accepted the sacrifice that Jesus has now made on our behalf!

Paul says it all so beautifully for us in Colossians 1, where he writes of Jesus: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of his body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15-20)!*

Jesus is the ONE WHO PAID EVERYTHING THAT HE HAD--HIS OWN PERFECT LIFE--TO PURCHASE US BACK FROM SIN, DEATH AND THE POWER OF THE DEVIL. And yet the Bible says of Jesus: "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of God!"

Jesus gave a similar analogy on the night before he died when he said to his disciples: **"Except a grain of wheat die and fall into the ground it remains alone! But if it dies and falls into the ground it will bring forth much fruit!"**

Secondly, the pearl as a gemstone is in a class all by itself, because there it comes to us perfectly--just the way it is!

What I mean by this is that unlike diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires, that must be cut, sized, shaped and polished by a skilled professional, whose proper title is a "lapidary," pearls, do not need to be cut, sized, shaped and polished. Pearl, when harvested, may be put directly placed into a string of pearls, or made into a beautiful set of earrings!

In our day, of course, some pearls have lost much of their value because they have been cultivated commercially in large, vast pearl beds! But there were no cultured pearls in Jesus' day.

In that first century world, the pearl was without a doubt--the MOST EXPENSIVE AND SOUGHT-AFTER GEM at that time! Diamonds had not yet been mined!

Other valuable stones were found on land, in rocks and in riverbeds in Jesus' day--and for the most part--there was very little danger being posed to the miners who discovered them. But the **dangers**

experienced by the ancient pearl diver in Jesus' day—found it necessary to take a deep breath and, with a heavy weight in his hand, allowed himself to be plunged deeply into the dangerous waters below. Sometimes that ancient diver, when he surfaced, would do so with a glistening pearl in his hand, but often his own blood would be raised up in the sea water with him--after his own body had been slashed by a merciless monster of the deep!

Thus Jesus, in attaining for us the pearl of great price, fought with all the monsters of the deep pit of hell (all the hosts of evil), and poured out his holy precious blood, for us, upon the cross, and earned for us, won for us and merited for us the gift of God's eternal salvation!

And all of this is a gift of God's grace--just as it was a gift of God's grace to choose the people of Israel to become his very own people! It was not because of what was within their hearts, but because of what was in his heart that he chose them! Listen to those magnificent words in our Old Testament lesson again today: ***"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh of Egypt. KNOW THEREFORE THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GOD, THE FAITHFUL GOD WHO KEEPS COVENANT AND STEDFAST LOVE WITH THOSE WHO LOVE HIM AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, TO A THOUSAND GENERATIONS!"*** (Deuteronomy 7:6-9)

"If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 8:31-32, 38-39)!

And how is this great joy of our eternal salvation given to us? How can we come to value our relationship with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ his Son--more highly than all other things? So often it's by faithfully doing what you are and I are doing here again this morning--though it's really something more properly understood that God is doing with us! It's whenever we are gathered around God's Word and Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper--**TREASURING CHRIST TOGETHER!**
AMEN