

Lent
March 4, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Parables: The Buried Treasure

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I was in elementary school, I could jump the fence in my backyard and go exploring in the neighbor's pasture. I liked to collect rocks and I found some great ones in the dirt. You would see just a bit of the rock poking up from the ground. Then I would dig it up and see if it was any good. I found all kinds of rocks and kept the ones I really liked. Once in a while I found quartz. Those were my treasures. Of course, the actual value of my treasures was approximately zero. That is how it is for most treasure seekers in this world.

Very few of those who went to California or Alaska for the gold rushes actually found enough gold to make the trip worth it, much less to become wealthy. Those who search the ocean depths for treasure ships rarely make enough to make the cost of searching worth it. Those who look for treasure on the beach with a metal detector are not likely to find a gold coin. They are more likely to find garbage. But people keep looking for treasure. The same was true for the people Jesus spoke to in our parables for tonight. They knew about looking for treasure and Jesus uses this to teach them about the kingdom of heaven. Listen to the parables about two treasures, one from the ground and one from the sea.

Matthew 13:44-46 (EHV)

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

We will look at these parables from two directions. First, we look at them from God's perspective as the treasure hunter and merchant. Then we look at them as if we are the seeker and merchant.

What does our God think when he digs around in the earth and finds us? Are we a glittering nugget of gold or a common piece of gravel? By nature we aren't even common gravel. We are garbage to be passed over or thrown away. Think about it. Does God want to give everything he has to purchase the person who loves money more than his family or his God? Does our God want the person who uses God's name as a curse word more than in praise and thanks? Does God want the person who thinks time hearing God's Word is wasted time or the person who ridicules others instead of helping them? Why would God give up everything to purchase a person who looks at lust inducing images? Would God ever want to keep a person who is a habitual liar or someone who is rarely content with the life God gave them?

The Passion History readings tell us exactly how our Lord gave everything to save us. But why? Did God see anything in you that made you attractive to him? By nature we are nothing but sinful, enemies of God. He should pass us by or throw us away. There is nothing good in us that God should pay anything to save us. And that is what makes God's grace so amazing! He paid everything when we were worth nothing. But Jesus came to seek and save the lost. God our Savior wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Our Lord does not desire the death of sinners but wants all to repent and be saved. And he gave everything to save us.

Jesus gave up his place in heaven to be born of the virgin Mary, to take on human flesh and blood. Jesus gave up his glory and honor as the true Son of God to walk this earth. And though he was still true God, he was not given the honor and glory as true God as he was hungry and thirsty, mocked and ridiculed, beaten and flogged. Jesus gave up everything as he allowed weak men to condemn him to crucifixion and sinful men to nail him to the cross. He gave up everything, even his perfect relationship

with his Father as the punishment for the sin of the world was laid upon Christ. The Son of God gave up his perfect and innocent life to purchase you for God. Though we had nothing good in ourselves, Christ gave everything to save us.

We are God's treasured possession, purchased with the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. And this is our treasure – that we have been purchased by Christ, that every sin is forgiven. God's treasure is us. Our treasure is the gospel.

The thing is, God didn't make you search for the gospel like a merchant looking for fine pearls. You were going along your life and God intervened with his saving gospel. Perhaps it was when your parents brought you to be baptized and the Holy Spirit gave you faith and made you a treasured possession of your Father in heaven. Maybe it was when you heard the wonderful news of forgiveness through Christ and the Holy Spirit created faith in your heart to believe that Christ is your Savior. However, it happened, you did not have to search for or purchase this wonderful gift of salvation through faith in Christ.

However, now that this treasure of the gospel is yours, what are you going to do with it? Or rather, what are you willing to give because of it?

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The first man “sold all that he has and buys the field.” The second man “sold all that he had and bought” the pearl. They were willing to sell all that they had for the treasure. We have the treasure of the gospel, the riches of Christ's forgiveness, and the inheritance of eternal life. How will our lives show that we treasure these free gifts from Christ?

Do you have a junk drawer in your home? It is that drawer in which you put things that you don't want to throw away but you are not sure where to store. Surely these items will be useful someday. Sometimes the treasure of the gospel can be stashed away in the junk drawer of our lives. We have other things that seem more important and more urgent at the time. School and education are important for our future so hearing God's Word becomes less important. Sports and activities have strict rules about practice and push hearing the gospel into the junk drawer. “It will be there when I need it” we tell ourselves. Career and family take priority for a time. Arguing politics on social media or binge watching a series push the gospel into that junk drawer for a while. “I'll get back to God's Word when I need it” we tell ourselves.

Then what will we do when trouble strikes, when fears and worries attack, when guilt and sins weigh us down? The gospel is buried in the junk drawer under broken crayons, paperclips, candles, several kinds of batteries and lots of pens that may or may not work anymore. When the gospel is treated like this, we carry around extra worry and guilt.

To treasure the gospel is to use it, to hear it, to believe it. The gospel is not something common that we put in the junk drawer or a treasure that we put in the lock box at the bank. The gospel is a treasure we can enjoy each day. Go to God's Word and hear of your Savior. Listen and believe that he has forgiven your sins and taken away your guilt. Receive comfort when you feel alone or scared that Christ will never leave you or forsake you. When the world or your own thoughts tell you that you are worthless, listen to the gospel. For Christ tells you what you are worth. You are worth everything that he has. You are worth what he paid to save you, his very life. You are his treasured possession. And that is why we treasure Christ and his gospel above all else in this world.

Amen