

Dear treasures and pearls of great price of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus is at it once again with the parables. Actually he hasn't stopped, we just have in breaking them up over three weeks. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, when the man finds it he goes and sells all he has and buys the field. And again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls of great value, went and sold all he had and bought it.

Jesus didn't provide the explanation like he previously did with these parables. But it seems simple enough. The kingdom of heaven is very valuable and we are to go out and sell all we have to buy the Lord's treasure. Is this not the ultimate in Christian zeal, sell all you have in order to purchase and win others for Jesus?

After all treasure must be found, otherwise it lies and gets dirty and broken. But wait... that's exactly who you are, dirty thoughts, dirty actions, broken hearts, breaking the hearts of others, lives shattered at the sin in your lives and as you sin against others. If people need to go out and win people, this would be like pearls and treasure going out in search of pearls and treasure. Treasures do not seek out to find their treasure hunters, pearls do not float to the top of bay waters. They must be found and brought where they are highly valued.

In the previous parables of the last couple of weeks in this same chapter, Jesus has given explanation to some of the parables. The interpretation is consistent. The one who sows the seed, the one who is responsible for the harvest, the one who looks after the field, is the Lord, Jesus himself. The fields are the world. The crop that produces fruit, the wheat, that which is carefully planted and preserved, that which is of value is you. You are the treasure!

You, treasures and pearls, are enslaved in this field of sin. You remain hidden within this world of sin and death. You are fallen and dirty. You remain weak and fragile. In anger and fear, in despair and doubt of our Lord's promise to redeem you. Proudful and arrogant of your value and worth to this field. Yet whining and complaining of want for more. This is the condition of the treasure our Lord finds.

Despite all this, the man, Jesus, still seeks purchase and redeem the treasure and the field. “In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” So often we think of joy in terms of temporary experiences that come and go. Christ’s joy does not go, it is eternal joy. It is joy knowing that you, the treasure will be given a value and restored forever. It is this joy which moves Christ, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2)

The field, the treasure, cost him everything! The clothes on His back were removed and used as a gaming prize. (Matt. 27:35) Later in this same chapter of Matthew, his earthly relationships would begin to be lost, as those close to him would reject him. As He goes to endure the cross even His beloved disciples would abandon Him. (Matt 26:56) The joy of the cross would even come at the price of being abandoned and despised by the Heavenly Father as he cries the words of the Psalms, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) This is the cost of the field, this is the cost of the pearls and the treasure, and He pays it for the joy that was set before Him.

Our Lord has purchased the entire field by His holy precious blood. He is intent on digging up every treasure in the field. All sinners and their transgressions are purchased and valued, for your sin is forgiven. The price He paid is enough! We don’t have the treasure or enough for an acceptable price to purchase the field ourselves. As is often proclaimed, we cannot be the ones searching the field and purchasing the treasure and pearls. We cannot find the treasure and we have nothing of our own of value to purchase anything, for even our earthly treasures are gifts from Him who created and purchased the field. Man had nothing to offer to pay Jesus to come and redeem us.

But are we sure then that we are treasure? A treasure only has value to the one searching for it, the value is only that which someone is willing to pay for it. “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” it is often said. Our sinful hearts do not always look around and see our Lord’s treasure. If we were honest with ourselves, we would look around the church and think, “there’s no way I would pick that person.” We would probably also look around our circle of friends and neighbors and think, “now that’s one who I would’ve purchased.” And perhaps within ourselves we question our value, for in the mirror of the Law we see just how dirty and broken we are, we can see how there is nothing of value. There may even be times when we don’t understand how our Lord can honestly see us treasure and pearls.

But you are. Your value is given in the price paid, Jesus has valued you to give His life. You are the treasure, because He who bought you “has chosen you to be a people of His treasured possession.” (Deut. 7:6b) He bought you, “not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death.” (Small Catechism, Explanation of 2<sup>nd</sup> Article) His full-time occupation, His entire life, is dedicated to the enduring search and digging up of fine pearls and treasure. He has sought you out, purchased you and redeemed you, and forgives your sins.

And finally, Jesus gets off this kick about parables with seeds, crops, fields, and treasures and moves on to something practical. “Again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.” Though the sea is really like a field, vast and ready to be harvested. The one’s working the field, Jesus in the parables, the net, cast out by the Father into the world. All the fish are caught.

Just as some seeds are scorched, some weeds are left in the field, some fish are dead. The sorting comes at the end of the age, so that none of the wheat is lost, none of the righteous hastily thrown into the fiery furnace. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For those treasures would rather remain buried, the bad fish, the evil one’s would rather remain in their sin. Notice though, that the fish are separated not on account of what they have done, but rather on what they are. The wicked are cast into the fiery furnace, the righteous gathered and kept secure in the net to be brought into the boat.

You, the treasured fish, are brought safely into the boat. Church buildings are often called the nave from the entrance to the altar area, as the shape of many churches resembles that of a boat. You are brought safely into the boat through the waters of Holy Baptism and caught in the net of Christ. You reside safely here because of who you are, righteous and holy, baptized into Christ! The old Gospel, promised from the beginning, given in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, brought new to you as you receive the gifts of the Sacraments and daily forgiven of your sins. Thus you abide in Him, and He in you, unto life everlasting. Amen.