

Written Copy: Matthew 13:47-50 “What is the Treasure, Pearl, and Net”

9th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 12

Sunday, July 30th, 2023

Text: Matthew 13:37-50

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Exegetical Statement

In the midst of rising opposition Jesus teaches His followers how precious they are in the Father’s eyes and in His. They are like a buried treasure. They are like the pearl of great price that He the merchant found. Christ came to seek and save the lost, to save them, and gave all that He had in His suffering and death. His Spirit lays ownership on us through Baptism and the gift of faith. We may still be hidden treasure in the eyes of the world but not in the eyes of our Savior. And His reign and rule is like what happens when the large weighted dragnet is thrown out. In His visible Church are gathered all kinds of fish, all kinds of people. Some are the good fish of faith who will be revealed to be that body and soul at the end of the age in the Resurrection of all flesh And those who did not truly believe in Christ as Lord and Savior will be revealed to all as the rotten putrid fish they really are, and will be separated out from amongst the true believers who are the Church, to suffer in body and soul in hell for eternity.

Focus Statement:

How does the Father see us? We are the buried treasure and precious pearl. He chose us from the foundation of the world and loves us as such even though we don’t often look like it. He sent His Son to pay the price to redeem us from the devil’s kingdom which was His suffering and death. He bought us with His precious blood and places us safely into His reign and rule. He arranged all things in our life so that we would be individually purchased in our Baptism and safely stored away and protected by Spirit working through all things for our eternal good. At the end of the age when the angels gather all those who call themselves the Church, we will be revealed on Resurrection Day to be the true treasure God makes us to be by grace. We will be His treasure for eternity.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

In seeing and knowing our sinfulness, we sometimes forget how God truly sees us. We are not members of His Church by anything we do or just by calling ourselves that. There will come a day when the unbelievers will be exposed and will suffer body and soul for eternity.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Give thanks to the Lord who chose us and declares us to be His precious treasure. Don’t worry about those who call themselves Christians but are not. They will be shown to be the rotten fish they truly are.

Subject Sentence: Precious treasures revealed on the Last Day

Introduction:

Are you someone who has inherited or been given old stuff that belonged to your parents or grandparents, and have wondered if it was worth anything? Have you ever wondered if that old dusty lamp, or the dish or bowls with the flowery designs that you would never use for company, or that weird painting might be worth a fortune, or at least a part of one? PBS Antique Roadshow is about people just like you who find out they own something of great value, only they never knew it. The show travels to various places across the country where experts in antiques and what is valuable gather. And everyday people like you can bring items that they suspect could be worth something. Now probably most of those who come to these shows never make the air, because what they've brought is actually, well, crap. What they brought was not worth the price of gas it took to drive there. But some, those that they feature on the show, wind up being very surprised to find out what exactly they've been holding onto. One such person was a lady whose first name is Taylor. She brought a collection of jade carvings of everyday normal things like a bowl and a tea pot that she had inherited from her father. They looked to be similar to the kind of thing you might find in one of those knick knack gift shops, or at a Cracker Barrel. They were special to her because they were her father's, but not for any other reason. What she didn't realize was how special they were to collectors. She was shocked to hear that her entire collection was actually worth millions of dollars! It was like discovering a hidden treasure.

Interpreting Jesus' Parables the Wrong Way

In the first of the three parables that make up our Gospel Reading Jesus tells us of just such a treasure being discovered, and that the one who discovers it must acquire it. In this first parable a man stumbles across a treasure chest in a field. He buries it again so no one else will take it, then goes and sells all he had to buy the field he found it in, so that both the field and the treasure become his legal property. In Jesus 2nd parable He tells us of a merchant searching for beautiful pearls and comes across one he is so taken by he sells all he has to possess this newly discovered treasure. We understand the basic plotline of these parables, but how should we interpret them?

We know that Jesus' parables are stories of everyday people from Jesus' time and place: 1st century Palestine, who are doing everyday things. But these Parables have a spiritual lesson that Jesus is imparting to those who can understand them. So, in these first two parables who are these men who sell all that they have to own the treasure, to purchase the pearl? And along with that, what does the treasure and the pearl represent? The natural inclination for many Christians is to see the treasure as the Kingdom of Heaven, or as I like

to refer to it “The Reign and Rule of Christ in our lives”. After all, Jesus begins each parable with “The kingdom of heaven is like”. If the buried treasure and the pearl is this kingdom, His reign and rule in our hearts and lives by faith, then that makes us the one searching and finding, right? We are the ones that should see the Reign and Rule of Christ so valuable that we would give up all our other earthly treasures to possess it. Many denominations preach these parables this way.

But that creates a problem for what we as Lutherans hold to be true about salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** ⁹ **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

Our work can never bring the Reign and Rule of Christ to us. Yet here in this parable we seem to be the one searching, and giving all we have to possess it. Now think about how precious a treasure that reign and rule of Christ is: His saving and loving presence in our hearts and lives now that explodes into the total physical and spiritual reality of all things on the Last Day. It leads us through this world and into the eternal paradise to come. And there is nothing else in this world that could ever be as precious to us. Given that, you can understand how truthful this passage from Ephesians is. We could never ever afford to purchase this treasure; it is beyond our means. We can't even afford the downpayment to set it aside until we could do enough good works to qualify.

Interpreting Jesus' Parables with Us as The Treasure

But what if in our interpretation we saw ourselves as the treasure? Well, you might argue, “How can I be a treasure? Don't I confess regularly that I am a poor miserable sinner? I can't remember in any of the liturgy where I'm called a treasure hidden in the field or pearl of great price!” And you would be right. In our own eyes as we look at our sin we certainly don't look like treasures or pearls. However, there is a funny thing about the Reign and Rule of Christ, things are not always what they appear to be at first glance. We often do not see things the way God sees them. So then, how do we look in the eyes of God?

Paul writes in our Epistle Lesson from **Romans 8:31-32** ³¹ **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² **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?** Why was the Father willing to give over what was most precious to Him, His Only Begotten Son, into suffering and death? Because those He did it for were very precious to Him. Because you are very precious to Him. Paul teaches that all who believe did not come to faith by chance or choice. God chose you before you were born to be a part of His Reign and Rule now and into eternity. And from the day of your birth, He worked out all things to make it happen.

He knew that no one could choose to be His precious child. He knew that no one could pay the price of admission to His kingdom, the price to be a part of His reign and rule now and into eternity. That price is a perfect and sinless life, which no man can give; no man except One. The perfect Son of the Heavenly Father can and did pay the price of admission for all mankind. He paid with His perfect life given over to suffering and death for you. His blood paid the price to save all mankind out of the devil's grasp, out of the devil's kingdom, and make them good enough to enter into His kingdom, His Reign and Rule now and into eternity. And He has chosen to give it to you personally.

You and I are the hidden treasure. We don't look like it from the world's point of view because it values power and money. We don't look like it from our point of view because we know ourselves as sinners. But the Lord sees us differently. He sees us through His eyes of love, the greatest love, a sacrificial love that moved Him to choose you before you were ever born, before the foundation of the world. You are the pearl of great price. His Son willingly sacrificed all that He had to possess you by faith.

And your coming into His possession was not by accident And He arranged all things in your life to make sure you received this precious gift personally. He chose your parents. He made sure they brought you to the baptismal font, where His Spirit entered into your life and claimed you for His own possession in the name of the Triune God. He personally gave to you all that Christ died and rose again to win for you. It is now yours by faith. And He continues to work in your life to keep you in that faith, even as the devil tries to shake you out of it.

The devil likes to point to your continued sin. He tells you "That's not something a child of God would think or say or do. Others might be His children, but not you." But we have a better voice speaking on our behalf. We have the One who will judge all people on the Last Day. For each and every thought, word, and deed that would earn for us removal from the Reign and Rule of God and send us to eternal punishment, Jesus, the Righteous Judge points to them and says: "This one is covered by my blood, and so is this one, and so is this one." In that special connection you have through your baptism Jesus takes your sin and gives to you His right standing. Because of this you are declared in the eyes of the Father right now to be that priceless pearl. You are that treasure, whose worth is often hidden from the eyes of the world as well as our own. But not from God's eyes.

Through the continued work of forgiveness given to you in Baptism, you remain His precious child in His eyes. He works in and through all things so that you remain that Treasure and that Pearl of Great Price. Try as hard as he might, the devil cannot change that. As Paul testifies to us nothing in the visible creation or the spiritual realm can ever separate you from the love that God has for you, that is poured into your heart by the all the Gospel promises we have in Christ.

Our Heavenly Father is intentional in His work of salvation on your behalf. It is no accident that you are declared to be His precious child. It is no accident that you are members of His Church: either the fellowship of all believers throughout space and time, as well as His Church gathered here in this place that we call Lamb of God. Working in ways that may be mysterious to you, He called, directed, and brought you here today. He gave you the gifts and talents that you have so that you could be an important part of the work that He has given us to do: build one another up in the faith, and share that faith with those we meet and deal with in our everyday lives. You are His Treasure and Pearl of Great Price. And He gave what was most precious to have you now and forever.

How This Helps Us Understand the Parable of the Net

How does this understanding of who we are in His sight give us a correct understanding of Jesus third parable in our Gospel Lesson: The Parable of the Net? You and I are fish swimming around with all other people in the sea that is the world. Jesus Church on earth opens it's doors to welcome all kinds of fish, all kinds of people into it's midst saying "Y'all come! Hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Hear about the God who looks upon you as a Hidden Treasure and a Pearl of Great Price." And many believe by the faith given when these Gospel Words are shared; many, but not all. There are plenty of fish who call themselves Christian in this world that really are not. They have a god other than our Triune God. Yet we need not worry about this. Our Lord knows who is who. He knows who His treasure is and who has refused the free gift of faith that would've made them that.

Jesus describes the use of what's called a "dragnet". It was a bigger and heavier net than fishermen normally used. It had weights tied to it so it sunk down. And then it was dragged along and up to the shore bringing with it all that might be caught in it. It would bring to shore fish that were good and those which are bad. It would bring to shore fish that were good to eat as well as fish that were poisonous, fish that were rotten because they were dead.

On the Last Day when Jesus returns His angels will do the work of the dragnet, gathering all people before Him who is the righteous judge. Many will be bad fish, poisoned by sin, having refused the gift of faith that would've healed them and turned them into good fish. No matter if they are still alive when He comes or have been long in the grave. All will be given bodies in which they will be sent off to eternal suffering, where they will experience the weeping of utter hopelessness, and the gnashing of teeth that comes with physical, emotional and spiritual torment. And this will be their life lived out forever and ever without end.

But you, you needn't worry about accidentally being sorted into their pile and being sent of with them. The Father knows you. He knows you as His Pearl of Great price, so precious in His eyes. Jesus knows you as His Treasure, once hidden from the eyes of the world, but now hidden no longer. You will be raised body and soul and made to be what you were only declared to be in this life. You will be transformed into the Pearl of Great price that is your resurrected and glorified body and soul. You will become within and without that Treasure that the Father always knew you as. And you will be His and He will be yours forever in eternal life.

Conclusion

Is there a chance that some of that stuff that is collecting dust in your attic or in your garage is worth a lot of money? Maybe. But in most cases don't bet on it. Besides there is something you possess that is worth far more than even those million-dollar Jade carvings Taylor possessed. You are a hidden treasure in your Heavenly Father's eyes. He always knew you were before you were born, and loved you as such, even though you many times don't look or act like it. You are the Pearl of Great price in your Savior's eyes, worth so much that He gave His very life, His body broken, and blood shed on the cross just so He could claim you as His own. He worked all things out in your life to put His name upon you in baptism, and He continues to work in your life so that nothing can separate you from Him, because you are that precious to Him. And on that Last Day when He returns, Resurrection Day, when all will be gathered before Him, He will show you off to be the treasure He declared you to be in this lifetime. He will adorn you with a New glorified body and a purified soul. You are declared to be His priceless treasure now, and you and I will live as such in eternal life with Him forever. Please pray with me: ***"Dear Jesus, we thank you and praise for knowing us, for making us, and keeping us your priceless treasure. Keep us steadfast in this faith now and unto eternal life to come. Amen"***