8/29-30/20 Kingdom Parables: Treasure Rev. Amy Haines

Matthew 13:44-52

What’s your greatest treasure? Is it a family heirloom? Is it a large stock portfolio? Is it a long-standing relationship? Is it your faith in Jesus?

For who or what would you sacrifice? What is worth your investment of time or money? What would be worthy of your commitment to a different way of thinking or a different way of living?

Today, as we finish our time in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we are once again invited to reflect on the great treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven, once again invited to commit to God’s ways as our ways, ways not only for life after death but also for life here and now.

Today, we once again listen to Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven through parables, stories with a twist that take ordinary items to tell the truth of God’s kingdom ways.

Over the past two weeks we have heard Jesus describe God’s Kingdom ways through the parable of the soils and the parable of the weeds. We’ve been reminded that when we see a hardened heart as a lost cause, God continues to plant the seed of His Word in all of our lives.

We’ve been reminded that when we wish to purge the evil around us, God holds out hope until the final judgment so that even the worst offender may come to believe in Him.

Other parables in this chapter remind us that when we feel too small, too few or too insignificant to make a difference in this world, God will use whoever is willing to transform lives and transform communities.

Today, we reflect on the final parables in this chapter—stories of hidden treasure, a pearl of great value, and a fishing net. May those with ears, listen.

**“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that somebody hid in a field, which someone else found and covered up. Full of joy, the finder sold everything and bought that field.”**

Have you ever watched Antiques Roadshow, where an ordinary person brings what appears to be an ordinary item to get appraised? Sometimes, the items are not worth much. Occasionally, however, the value of the items surprises and excites even the appraisers.

The same can be said for eBay. What may be common and ordinary to one person may become a priceless treasure to another.

..Philip Gura, an American literature professor, paid $481 for a photograph of poet Emily Dickinson. The snapshot is just the second photo of Dickinson known to exist, which makes Gura's discovery priceless.

..Some years ago, Pastor Mike Ernst of Hales Corners, Wisconsin stumbled across an old Corvette. As a car aficionado he knew he'd found something unique in this early 1960s', rusted and worn-out Chevrolet. Buying it from the college student who was tooling around in it, Ernst took it to his barn and began the slow work of restoration. It soon became clear that this was no ordinary, old Corvette. Some searching on the Internet revealed that Pastor Mike's old clunker was in fact the world famous 1962 Gulf Oil Corvette – a car that won first place 12 times in races at Daytona, Sebring and beyond. When Ernst found the car, he paid $3,000 for it.

It was later sold at auction for almost $1.5 million.

..Maria Ariz, a nurse from New Jersey, paid $16 on eBay for a pair of jeans. When she wrote the seller to ask about other items, the two fell in love, and have been married for seven years.

-“Jesus Loves a Good Deal” 7-24-11 homileticsonline.com

While none of these people sacrificed all that they owned to buy what became a priceless treasure, nonetheless they were surprised to find a treasure of great value amid the ordinary and common of life. Those treasures changed their lives.

And in finding such treasures, they also experienced joy. This is the joy of Luke 15, the parables of the lost being found. When the shepherd leaves 99 to find the one lost sheep. When a woman throws a party after finding a lost coin. When the prodigal son is welcomed home.

To the first hearers of this parable, they knew the surprise of finding hidden treasure in a field.

Before banks, when robbers and vandals and tax collectors roamed freely, it was common practice to bury valuables. But in this parable, the one who found the hidden treasure sold everything he had in order to buy the field. His surprising discovery changed his life.

The kingdom of heaven is like that treasure. God’s kingdom is not proclaimed by billboard or brute force. It is often found in the intimacy of relationships, through random acts of kindness and intentional acts of faithfulness. It is often found amid the ordinariness of everyday life. It is found in the bread and cup of holy communion, in the phone call or hug of a fellow disciple, the welcome of a stranger, and the hope of God’s Word.

When we experience God’s kingdom ways, the joy of knowing Jesus will change our lives forever. Our values will change. Our focus will change. We will continue to look not for the evil in our world, but the good. We will be on the lookout for God sightings, the presence of God in the ordinary and extraordinary. We will learn to sacrifice not for selfish ambition but for God’s ways in this world.

William Barclay once said:

Joy has nothing to do with material things, or with a man’s outward circumstance …

a man living in the lap of luxury can be wretched, and a man in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy.

 -thepastorsworkshop.com:joy

Joy is not about what we have, but whose we are. What a gift we have been offered, the treasure of God’s kingdom ways in our lives today!

 **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it.”**

There is an ongoing debate over sunken treasure. Does it belong to the treasure-hunting companies, or to the academics who seek to archive and preserve such historical artifacts?

In 2007 a Florida treasure-hunting company discovered a Colonial-era shipwreck in the Atlantic Ocean, including a treasure that one coin dealer estimated at $500 million.

As one reporter summarized: “[Academics] are not infected by the need to search, not bound to feed their families by keeping history beautiful. The treasure hunter needs to look, and that is always the way things lost forever get found.”
 -“ Jesus and the Venus Rosewater Dish” 7-27-08 homileticsonline.com

 Robert Kurson, “Curators under the sea,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 2007

Imagine if the owner of Rogers Jewelers in his search for the perfect diamond finally found one and sold his entire company to acquire it.

Imagine if an art connoisseur found a long lost painting and sold the rest of his valuable art collection to buy that one piece.

Imagine if a parent sold the only item they owned of value in order to fund the education of their child.

Imagine having such singular focus that nothing else mattered except that purchase. This singular focus is often found in athletes who work hard to be the best at their game. This singular focus is often found in business men and women who want to be known as the best in the business. This singular focus takes commitment. And sacrifice.

The kingdom of heaven is like that merchant. God risked the life of his own Son Jesus to save our lives. God lives with a singular focus to redeem all of the world, and all creation in it.

Jesus lived with a singular commitment to bring God’s good news to the earth, the good news of salvation and grace.

Yet Jesus also called his disciples to live with a singular commitment to follow him, giving up livelihoods and families, sacrificing ambition and prestige, to live by a new way in this world, God’s kingdom ways.

What if we live by the same commitment and sacrifice to make sure God’s ways are our ways in our lives? What if we lived by the same care for others, especially those struggling and those rejected by others? What if we lived by the same welcome for others, even those we don’t agree with?

Are we willing to be that focused, that committed, that centered in God, God’s Son and God’s ways as to give up everything else in life in order to obtain the gift of heaven and the joy of faith?

..A student at Dallas Theological Seminary several years ago was struggling with God’s call on his life. He had told God that he was willing to go anywhere to serve him, anywhere but Africa.

He struggled with this for months as his graduation approached. But finally he was able to tell God that he was willing to go even to Africa for Him. As soon as he had settled that in his heart he had total peace. And guess what? God didn’t send him to Africa. After graduation he got a job teaching at that same seminary. God didn’t want him to go to Africa, but God wanted him to be willing to go to Africa. Is there anything in your life that you would be unwilling to give up if God asked you to?

 -Steve Dow 7-02 sermoncentral.com

As I worked on this sermon this week, I recognized that I could have chosen a different closing hymn for Sunday. I could have chosen “I Surrender All.” Remember those words:

I surrender all; I surrender all

All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

What are we willing to surrender, what are we willing to commit to, what are we willing to treasure, in order to live by God’s ways as our ways in this world?

 **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that people threw into the lake and gathered all kinds of fish. When it was full, they pulled it to the shore, where they sat down and put the good fish together into containers. But the bad fish they threw away. That’s the way it will be at the end of the present age. The angels will go out and separate the evil people from the righteous people, and will throw the evil ones into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.”**

Fishing on the Sea of Galilee was not an afternoon of leisure with a pole and a small net.

No, fishing on the Sea of Galilee was the hard, backbreaking work of net fishing. Dragging a large net through the waters to see how many fish could be caught. This was the livelihood of many of the disciples before they followed Jesus. And they knew that when you net fished, you caught both the fish you wanted and the fish you didn’t want.

The kingdom of heaven is like that net, in that God seeks to gather all of us into the community of faith. Similar to the past two weeks, no matter what kind of fish we are, no matter if we are rocky soil or good soil, no matter if we are seen by others as wheat or weeds, no matter our background, our struggles, or our current situations, God loves us all. God’s gifts are for the world, not just a small remnant long ago in Judea. Not just one denomination. Not just one race.

God offers the kingdom of heaven to each and every one of us. God offers us all the gift of salvation, the gift of new life, the gift of love through God’s Son Jesus.

Yet God is also aware that not everyone whom God loves will love God in return. Not everyone will choose to follow Christ. Not everyone will value God and God’s ways. Like it or not, there will be a time of reckoning. But that time will not be when we want it, but when God says so, at the end of the present age. At the end of our lives.

Even as God loves us, God cannot force us to faith. God offers us the free will to choose our path. And sometimes, we will choose a way other than God.

Today, however, we are invited once again to choose the way of God. To choose God’s kingdom ways as our ways. To find our treasure not in the things of this world—not in material possessions, not in political power, not in trophies, not in the ladder of success—but to find our treasure in an ongoing and eternal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

As Matthew 6:21 reminds us:

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

As we finish our time in Matthew Chapter 13, may we cling to the treasure that is the kingdom of heaven in our midst, God’s ways that can be our ways, ways we pray for each and every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

And may we move forward in joyful faithfulness, proclaiming through our lives the good news of the gospel.

Let all who have ears, listen, learn and live as God would have us live! Amen.