

Pentecost 6 2011 [PR 12]
Matt. 13:31-33; 44-52 “You Lucky Stiff!”

Jesus uses 5 images to talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is like:

- a tiny mustard seed hidden in the ground,
- >like yeast hidden in the loaf,
- >like treasure hidden in a field,
- >like a pearl of great value and
- >like a net thrown into the sea.

Each of these illustrations point to the hidden nature of the Kingdom of God... A tiny seed hidden in the ground produces a great plant, yeast hidden in the dough raises the bread in a mysterious way, treasure, hidden in a field, waits to be found, a pearl of great value is hidden away for some lucky stiff to find it, and a net that is thrown into the deep water hides in order to catch fish. The Kingdom of God is hidden all around us. We don't see it yet it is right under our noses.

We all love a “hidden treasure” story. We've grown up on stories of the hidden treasure of pirates. These tales live on in many forms. A man buys an old picture at a flea market and hidden in the frame is the 25th known copy of the Declaration of Independence...which sold recently for \$8.5 million. Or the solid gold brooch found by a fellow with a metal detector in York, England. The brooch was over 500 years old and sold for \$3 million. Then there are the treasures of bones of dinosaurs or the artifacts of Native Americans that are discovered and sell for thousands of dollars. Buried treasure is all around us! Wouldn't it be great to find some treasure in your attic or in your yard?!

We dream about finding other treasure as well. We dream half-embarrassed dreams of winning the lottery and living the easy life. We dream of becoming rich & successful or popular & famous. We dream of getting out of the rat race and living on easy street. We dream of retirement. If only our dreams would come true, if only we would find hidden treasure.

The story Jesus tells of hidden treasure goes like this... “**The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**” The treasure was there, hidden in the ground. The fellow who found it wasn't

out looking for it. He didn't say to himself one morning, "I think I'll go out and find some hidden treasure today." No, he was just walking along and he stubbed his toe on it. He didn't work for it, earn it, deserve it. He just stumbled onto it. Now notice his reaction. He hid the treasure and then in joy he went and sold everything he had and bought the field. Sounds vaguely dishonest, kind of like going to a used car lot to buy a car and upon inspecting the truck finding a suitcase full of cash. You quickly close the trunk, find a salesman and buy that car! The man found treasure hidden in a field, the lucky stiff. He just stumbled onto it. And on finding that treasure he was set free...free from worry about his future, free from worry about his life, what he would eat or drink or wear from that point on. He was set free...free to sell everything he had in order to possess that treasure.

Now this parable can be used in two ways by a preacher. One way is to turn it into law, turn it into something you have to do, by saying, "You all need to go out and find your treasure." *"Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream."*

"If you look hard enough and long enough you will find your treasure."

"If you never give up, someday you will find your treasure."

"Someday your ship will come in."

Now remember, this is a parable about finding the Kingdom of God. The problem with using the law to interpret this parable is that it puts the burden of finding the Kingdom of God on you. If you leave church today with the burden of finding the Kingdom of God, then you are burdened with a great duty and obligation to "get to work" searching for God's kingdom. The second problem with that interpretation is that it is not what Jesus meant to teach by the parable. The treasure is hidden. It is impossible to find it by looking for it, working for it, searching for it. It is hidden treasure and it stays hidden until you stumble over it.

The second way to use this parable is to use it as Jesus intended, which is as gospel. The Kingdom of God is not hidden on top of some mountain, difficult to get to waiting for us to find it. No, the Kingdom of God is hidden right here among us. We stumble upon it in our everyday life amidst the ordinary events of life. We may think that the Kingdom of God is to be found in some emotional high or some great spiritual experience that knocks our socks off, but it is more likely that we will stumble upon it in the course of everyday life. The treasure hidden in the field is right here, right now. It is hidden in this place and right here and right now I'm going to give it to

you. Here it is: “Your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. There it is! You heard it! Your sins are forgiven! Jesus entered into the darkness, the nothingness of death, and he rose triumphant for you! There is the hidden treasure! The kingdom of heaven comes to you today. You didn’t earn it or deserve it or even find it. This is the moment God has decided on. He comes to you in this place through his word and his sacraments. Believe it, it is for you! He has come to you in baptism, adopted you as his child. He comes to you in bread and wine. He is the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, the leaven in the loaf. God has decided give you the treasure of his kingdom. So there you have it. You have found hidden treasure right here – your ship has come in! (G. Forde, A More Radical Gospel, p. 214).

This kingdom of God is the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field. It is the tiny seed that, once planted in your heart, grows into a great shrub with many branches. This is the treasure that changes your life. It is the gospel. It is life’s greatest treasure.

Our response to finding this great treasure is radical joy. One of my seminary professors said that “joy is the serious business of heaven.” But that joy of the kingdom of heaven is also found here on earth. How you ask?

Joy is finding the treasure of the gospel when you hear the words, “Your sins are forgiven in Jesus”.

Joy is the response that springs up within your heart at the realization that you were lost but now you are found.

Joy is that deep-seated feeling of contentment founded on the security that you belong to God and that He will never let you go.

Joy is God’s gift to you who have found the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in His word this day.

Here in this place and in this word God has come to you today with the greatest treasure you will ever find. God has placed the treasure of his kingdom right in front of you! Today you have stumbled onto it! The time has come to sell out! Sell all your doubts and reservations. Sell all your attempts to hang onto your merits and achievements. The Kingdom of God has come and Jesus has opened the door for you and he invites you in...you lucky stiffs! (G. Forde, *ibid*, p. 214). Thanks be to God. AMEN