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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12A)

July 30, 2017

Text: Matthew 13:44–52

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's been a month of parables; or at least, three weeks of contemplating our Lord's parables from Matthew 13. Today, we consider three more parables and our Lord's conclusion to the value of being trained by them.

We'll take the first two parables together as they have the common theme of something valuable being obtained regardless of the cost associated with the purchase.

First, the parable of the treasure in the field. The man represents Jesus. And He finds a treasure, a once-in-a-lifetime treasure, hidden in a field. "Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (vs. 44). The second parable is similar. A merchant, who represents Jesus, is searching for fine pearls. In the ancient world, pearls were the most precious jewels, very much like diamonds today. According to vs. 46, the man who found the "one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it." In both parables, something of immense, extraordinary value is found; both times, everything else is sold in order to obtain the priceless treasure.

Now to the particulars. I've already said that the man in the first parable and the merchant in the second represent the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who searches and finds treasure and a fine pearl of priceless value. Never forget, dear saints of God, it's the Lord Jesus who does the searching and the finding. When you're lost and confused because of the struggles of living as a Christian in a very non-Christian world, take heart in the rock solid truth that Jesus seeks for His beloved people, finds them, and redeems them. Take heart, and be encouraged by our Lord's steadfast grace and enduring love.

This leads now to the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price; they represent Christ's beloved Church. You and all Christians are likened unto hidden treasure and a pearl of great price. Does that surprise you? Deuteronomy 7:6, part of today's OT reading, declares, "You are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who

are on the face of the earth.” Some might object and say those words apply to OT Israel. True enough, they do. But they also apply to us, the NT Church. For does not the apostle Paul call the Church the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16? And the apostle Peter, in I Peter 2:9, exalts in the fact that the NT Church is God’s chosen race, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, a people for his own possession. Every baptized saint of God is the most valuable, priceless treasure in the universe. So teaches Jesus.

Be encouraged, renewed, and strengthened in Christ’s love for you.

But there’s more we must consider in these two parables. Both teach us that Jesus sells everything He has in order to purchase His treasured possessions. It’s only as we read the Passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus later in Matthew’s Gospel that we begin to understand what this means for Jesus. His suffering, death, and resurrection show us not only the love He has for his treasured possession but also the terrible price it cost. Hear how St. Paul describes Jesus’ self-giving from Philippians 2:5–8,

... Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Such was the monumental work our Lord completed to redeem you, His beloved, treasured people. You, dear saints of God, are Christ’s treasured possession. These two parables remind us that God’s kingdom is about Jesus risking everything for His people. They are about His boundless love for you, His treasured people. You belong to Jesus forever, until the end of the age.

And that leads us to the third parable which deals with the end of the age. The focus of the parable of the dragnet is on the Last Day. God’s kingdom on earth is looking forward to this final day of consummation. Everything we preach and practice is colored and shaped by this extraordinary event: Jesus will gather unto Himself every human being at the great and awesome day of His return.

God’s kingdom is likened unto a dragnet that sweeps across the bottom of the water and draws in all kinds of fish; some good, some bad. The net represents the Word of God being taught throughout the world, to all people. Through the Church, Christ is

sweeping through the world with His net. And the sweeping will continue until the net is full.

The parable teaches us to be rather indiscriminate with the Gospel. It goes out to all people with no thought as to who will and will not receive it. The Church is all about bringing in all kinds of people and showing them the love of Jesus.

Once full, the contents of the net will be separated but only on the Last Day. The good fish, that is, believers in Jesus will be ushered into Christ's eternal heaven. The bad fish, that is, unbelievers will be "thrown into the fiery furnace" (vs. 50). Last week and this week, we've heard that ominous statement of our Lord, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs. 50).

One difficulty for many people is the Biblical doctrine of God's righteous condemnation of unrepentant sinners to an eternal hell. How can a merciful God eternally punish the people He's supposed to love? That's the question so often asked by skeptics and opponents of the Church. The parable of the dragnet doesn't answer that question. But the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price do. The answer is God has done something: God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, abandons everything in order to purchase His redeemed people. The cross of Jesus is God's answer to the judgment of hell.

And that's why we must never waver in our commitment as the people of God in this place to proclaim Jesus' cross and resurrection and to administer faithfully the holy Sacraments. These divine gifts bring our Lord's death and resurrection to us and all people. They give forgiveness of sin, new life, the Holy Spirit, and God's eternal kingdom.

The hidden treasure and the pearl of great price are only purchased through Christ selling all He had on the cross. The separation of the good and the bad fish is based solely upon whether or not people know Jesus in faith. I wasn't overstating the point when I said the entire NT is oriented to the Lord's Coming on the Last Day. Every moment of our lives is to be lived in joyful anticipation of Christ's return. The kingdom of heaven is like unto these truths, Jesus says at the beginning of each parable.

Our Lord concludes His teaching with a question directed to His disciples, those 12 men called to be His apostles. "Have you understood all these things?" To which, they

say yes. Through these parables, Jesus has trained them to in the ways of the kingdom of heaven so that they can serve as masters of the house who bring our treasures, new and old (vs. 52). The apostles aren't the owners of the house but scribes and chief servants of the house. In other words, they are charged with giving the authoritative teaching upon which the Church is to live.

That is, in fact, what's happening even this morning. We are reading and hearing the authoritative teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ as it has been preserved and handed down through the centuries in Holy Scripture, the Bible. This congregation is part of the one holy, Christian and apostolic Church. The treasures we bring out from new and old testaments are the gospel of the complete and free forgiveness of sins won for the world through the Lord Jesus Christ, the certain hope of eternal life in Christ, a redeemed and holy life in which we live out the grace and love of Jesus in the world through good works directed to our neighbors.

We have the greatest message ever heard. Dear saints of God, we, first and foremost, need to hear that message anew in faith. You are the treasured possession of the Lord Jesus, purchased and redeemed by His precious life and innocent suffering and death so that the judgment of the Last Day is a cause of joy and anticipation rather than dread or fear. Having so heard and believed that great message, share it with everyone the Lord brings into your life. The apostolic Church brings out treasures new and old so that they world can hear about Jesus.

The Lord Jesus bless you all ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.