

**Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 17, 2014**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**THE WORLD'S GREATEST TREASURE**

Matthew 13:44-46

**“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”**

Brothers and sisters loved by Christ;

One of the campgrounds we our family has frequently visited features an opportunity to relive the thrill of mining in the mountain streams. We've never done any mining there but here's how the activity worked. The water tower provided water for the stream. You'd purchase a bag of sand (mining rough) and pour some of it into your screen. You'd dip the screen into the sluice to wash away the dirt and to reveal your gems and fossils. It seems like fun entertainment but the treasure isn't worth the \$5-\$9 you have to pay for the bags of mining rough.

That's often the way it is in life – things that appear to be great treasures often end up being great disappointments. How different it is when it comes to heavenly treasures. God's treasures never disappoint us as our Savior teaches us in the parables of our text for today.

In our text both the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price are the Gospel which reveals our gracious salvation in Christ -- THE WORLD'S GREATEST TREASURE. 1) It is a treasure unknown to natural man, and 2) it is of priceless value.

Jesus' first disciples could easily understand what Jesus was talking about when He spoke about a “treasure hidden in a field.” In those days there were no banks or credit unions in which people could store their money. There were no safe-deposit vaults in which they could store their money or lock up their valuables. And so it was only natural for a person to preserve his savings by burying them in a secret place, which usually happened to be the ground.

The times were unsettled. There were many invasions, and governments changed quickly. And therefore many people divided their possessions into three parts: one part was cash to meet the regular expenses; another part was precious gems which could easily be transported when traveling; and the third part was safely buried in the ground – sort of a rainy day fund or retirement fund I suppose.

When a man died, however, the secret of the burial place of his treasure often died with him. So the earth became a "bank" of unclaimed deposits, remaining hidden until some lucky discoverer accidentally finds one. According to modern folklore there may even be such kinds of treasures buried in the soils of Wisconsin. Here's just one example.

*Being an outlaw means you have money, and everyone knows John Dillinger had a lot of money. Only months before he died, he buried \$200,000 in Wisconsin.*

*Dillinger was hiding out with a few of his outlaw buddies in April 1934. FBI agents found out they were hiding in the Little Bohemia Lodge in Mercer, Wisconsin, and they surrounded Dillinger, along with "Baby Face" Nelson and the other men. The FBI shot the first three men walking out the door, all three of whom happened to be civilians. Amid all the confusion, the gangsters were able to escape out a back entrance. It is said that Dillinger ran a few hundred meters (yards) north of the roadhouse where he buried \$200,000 in small bills inside a suitcase near two pines and an oak.*

<http://listverse.com/2013/08/03/10-real-life-hidden-treasures/>

From time to time one actually hears reports of individuals who have indeed found buried treasure. In 1906 a farmer in Turkey found an iron pot with over a thousand silver coins inside. So also, the man in our first parable found a treasure hidden in a field.

The merchant in the second parable also made a valuable discovery. He was a merchant, who dealt in pearls. Because diamond-cutting was a little known art in those days, preeminence in jewels was given to the pearl. Here was a merchant who dealt in pearls -- he bought them and sold them. And Jesus says that this man also made a great "find." Somehow, somewhere, this merchant stumbled upon an exquisite pearl -- a pearl of great price.

Jesus' point in both of these parables is that the men FOUND a something. They knew nothing of the treasure or the pearl beforehand, because they were both hidden. They were both "finds". The costly pearl of salvation in Christ can also be described as a "find" because natural man doesn't even know that it exists.

All men are by nature spiritually blind. No one can know by nature that Christ has purchased a perfect redemption for him, for all are born in spiritual darkness. Our pitiful, ignorant state is, as St Paul describes it, **"separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."** (Ephesians 2:12)

Because all people are by nature spiritually blind and dead and enemies of God, no one seeks this treasure, this costly pearl, by himself, but God leads a man to it and lets him find it out of grace. The man who found the treasure in the field wasn't looking for it, he just stumbled across it. The merchant who dealt in "fine pearls" found the costly pearl.

Likewise, no man, by nature, seeks out a salvation which is by grace in Christ Jesus. In fact, salvation by grace is foolishness to all men by nature. However, God graciously leads men to salvation in Christ and lets them find it. As Jesus said, **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"** (John 6:44). That's what happened in the case of the woman of Samaria, who came to the well on an ordinary errand, where she found the water of life. This is what happened to Zachaeus, who went out of curiosity to see the prophet from Nazareth, but found the Savior of the world. The same thing happened to Saul on his way to Damascus seeking to persecute Christians, but finding the Christ. And so it is with each one of us. We are all living examples of the truth of God's Word, which says, **"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me."** (Isaiah 65:1). Even those who do seek after the "fine pearls" of justice, philanthropy, peace among nations, better social conditions, moral living, and so forth, know nothing by nature about (nor seek after) the one exquisite pearl of great price which is the Gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Therefore we thank God that He has led us to that great, incomparable treasure, the costly pearl of salvation in Christ, and allowed us to find it. Thank God that through His Word and Sacraments He has brought us to know our Savior from sin.

We will truly want to thank God for that treasure, the costly pearl, because it is of priceless value. When the man found the treasure which was hid in the field he went and sold all of his possessions and bought the field to acquire the treasure. Likewise the merchant, when he had found the perfect gem, went and sold all that he had and bought that great pearl. Both of these men realized that here was something of exquisite value and priceless worth. Here was something which was worth more than anything else in the world.

With these parables Jesus teaches us that salvation through Christ, eternal life in heaven, is worth more than anything else in the world.

Without eternal life in heaven, a man has nothing. Jesus says: "*(Mark 8:36) What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" Is there anything here on this tiny, decaying earth, anything in our short lifetime that is worth more than an eternity of never-ending bliss in heaven?

Eternal salvation through Christ is a priceless treasure, a costly pearl, which moth cannot corrupt and no thief can steal. It is a treasure worth more than "gold, yea, than much fine gold." Who of us wouldn't be willing to sacrifice anything in order to obtain this treasure of the priceless pearl?

Eternal life is the pearl of great price, the treasure worth more than anything else. In fact, it is too costly for any man to buy it, for the price is way too high. But the amazing thing is that God presents it to sinful people as a free gift!

The cost of salvation is a perfect life. But no one is perfect: "**All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**" (Romans 3:23). But Jesus Christ is perfect. And Jesus' perfect life and perfect death have purchased our salvation for us. As St Paul writes, "**The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**" (Romans 3:24). The great, incomparable treasure, the costly pearl of salvation, is ours by the grace of God through faith in Christ our Redeemer.

What joy that brings to our lives! What wonderfully blessed people we are! Christ has died for us. We have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven through Him. Salvation is ours through faith in Christ! What peace it gives us to hear the prophet cry out, "**Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost**" (Isaiah 55:1).

We thank and praise God for He has led us to know that by grace "**we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast**" (Ephesians 2:9). We have as a free gift that which no one can purchase, namely, the great, incomparable treasure, the costly pearl of salvation in Christ.

Now, knowing that God has freely given us that treasure which we didn't deserve, we shall gladly be ready to set aside anything which might hurt us or not be pleasing to God. Like the men in the parables, we shall be ready to do anything for the sake of that costly pearl, that incomparable treasure.

We shall be ready to part with anything that is inconsistent with possession of salvation. We will gladly renounce all that is sinful, and we will gladly and willingly serve Christ with our whole hearts freely acknowledging that our own actions are worthless when it comes to our salvation. Our attitude will be that of St Paul, who wrote to the Philippians, "**But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain**

**Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:7-9).**

Like Paul, we will gladly deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Christ. And even as we give our Savior-Lord the very best of our time, talents, and treasure, we know that these things are nothing in comparison to the great treasure, the costly pearl of salvation in Christ which we have through faith by His grace.

Yes, thank God that the costly pearl of priceless value, the great treasure which is hidden from us by nature, is now ours by grace. Having this great, incomparable treasure, the costly pearl of salvation in Christ, we too can say with the confidence and determination of Martin Luther:

And take they our life,  
Goods, fame, child, and wife,  
Let these all be gone, they yet Have nothing won -  
The kingdom ours remaineth.

Amen.