

Christ the Lord Lutheran – Alief
10th Sunday after Pentecost
August 13, 2017

Pastor Degner
Matthew 13:44-52

“There’s nothing more valuable than Jesus!”

⁴⁴ “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.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

There’s nothing more valuable than Jesus!

I had a recurring dream as a child. I’d be walking along when suddenly a glitter in the grass would catch my eye. Upon closer inspection, I’d find a quarter. I’d pick it up...only to see another. And another. And then I’d start digging in the ground, pulling out all sorts of coins – some new, some old, some silver, some gold, stashing them in my pockets. Then I’d wake up.

I thought it was just me – but when years later, I told that dream to my brothers, they all said they’ve had similar dreams. Have you? It seems like this is something most human beings have in common: A fascination with hidden treasure. We dream about it. Movies are made about it. TV shows follow people who have literally dedicated their lives to finding it.

And maybe that’s why Jesus’ parables this morning draw us in. They’re both about men finding treasure. One man is just walking through a field and stumbles across it – the life savings some poor soul buried and died before he could dig up. And it’s so valuable he happily hurries to sell off everything else he held dear to buy the field and have it. And then there’s a merchant searching far and wide for fine pearls. Until he comes across one so beautiful, so perfect, so precious, that it makes the rest seem like costume jewelry. He sells them and everything else he has to buy it.

Of course, Jesus isn’t talking about gold or pearls here. He begins both parables: “The kingdom of heaven is like...” In other words, “This is what it’s like when God saves - this is what it’s like when people find Jesus.” Sometimes people stumble across him when they weren’t even looking. Sometimes they’ve been searching far and wide for something to fill the void in their heart and bring meaning to their life. Neither would find Jesus if God didn’t open eyes to see him. But when he does? But when he opens eyes to see Jesus and who he is and what he does and what he gives? It’s so precious all else pales in comparison. What you used to treasure most become trinkets. And you don’t have to sell it all to have Jesus – he gives himself for free! But you would. Because there’s nothing more valuable than Jesus.

They’re simple stories that teach a simple truth: There’s nothing more valuable than Jesus. The tougher question to wrestle with is: Why did he need to tell us? This wasn’t a lesson for unbelievers – he told this to his disciples, believers, you and me. And we have Jesus. And we know there’s nothing more valuable than Jesus.

But here's the thing: We still have the tendency to treasure trinkets. The treasures and pleasures of this world still glitter around us. And our eyes are drawn to them, and so are our hearts. We aren't immune from thinking that a little more money equals a little more peace of mind, or that having more or newer stuff will make us happier. From valuing our earthly relationships more than the one we have with Jesus, or thinking that success or peoples' praise can make me a 'somebody.'

And we think we can have the best of both worlds: Have Jesus and go about scooping up the trinkets, too. But only one can be most valuable, most precious, to us. And busy pursuing the world, we find less and less time to be in God's Word. In our eyes, Jesus begins to lose his luster. Soon find we don't really even want to be in God's Word – it's a chore, a distraction. And the end result is something like the reverse of these parables: A man with a priceless treasure walks away from it for trinkets, and a merchant with the most precious pearl trades it in for costume jewelry. Jesus once said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" But many have made the trade for far less.

Friends, that's why Jesus tells us these parables. So we take another look at what we already have – so that we don't let go. They aren't a command to value Jesus more; they're a description of how valuable he truly is. All the money in the world can't give you peace of mind – but Jesus does. He promises to provide daily bread without fail until he brings you to heaven. Even the best of earthly relationships can't give you the love you long for – but Jesus does. Unconditional love that never fails, even when you do. All the stuff in this world can only bring us a happiness that is here today and gone tomorrow – but Jesus gives joy that lasts. Joy now, because no matter how little you have, you have his love. Perfect joy forever in heaven. No matter how much of this world you have, it can't pay for a single sin, can't remove an ounce of your guilt, and it won't do you a bit of good in the hour of death – you'll lose it all. But Jesus does. His death paid for every sin; his forgiveness removes all your guilt; his resurrection guarantees your death will end in life!

There simply is nothing more valuable than Jesus. Your Savior reminds you of that here. But as he does, you see something else: There's nothing more valuable to him than you. It's not Jesus' point, but you can't help but see him in another place in this parable, can you? The man who finds something so precious to him that he joyfully gives up everything to make it his. Only the man is Jesus. And the precious treasure is you. So precious he gave up his throne on high and his life on a cross to purchase you and make you his own. And he'll do whatever it takes to keep you as his until he returns.

That brings us to the third parable – the net and the fish. The last day, when the angels sort out believers from unbelievers. There's a reason Jesus follows his "treasure" parables with this one. It's because, on that day, you'll see more clearly than ever before there's nothing more valuable than Jesus. When you see all of the trinkets of this world destroyed with fire. When you see Jesus' just punishment of all sin and all sinners...but you won't experience it. Because you have Jesus, and he has you. Then you'll see more clearly than ever how valuable Jesus' death on a cross for your sins is, how precious it is that God has forgiven you. And you'll see more clearly than ever before how precious you are to him, as he looks at you with love and takes you into his arms and sets you in his presence forever.

Until you see it with your eyes, let him show you in his word. So that Jesus never loses his luster, so that you don't treasure trinkets, let him show you in his word, in his supper: There is nothing more valuable than Jesus. And there is nothing more valuable to him than you. Amen.