

A merchant who makes his living pushing pearls spends his days scouring the markets for the best of the best. When he finds it, the man mortgages his home and sells his cars on Craigslist to purchase that single, sparkling pearl. You might think it a waste, but not to Jesus. For him, such sacrifice, for such treasure, is well worth the investment.

Jesus is all about the joy that comes from discovering something priceless while perusing the ordinary. For Jesus, the greatest of such joys, the most magnificent of flea market finds is none other than the Kingdom of Heaven. In these parables, Jesus tells us that the very reign and rule of God, the loving and life-changing activity of God is breaking into our world and is available to us now. It's here to be discovered and embraced. Yet, like a Honus Wagner baseball card (worth \$3.12 million) sitting in a shoebox at some grandmother's garage sale, the Kingdom of Heaven is found in unassuming places and encountered in unlikely ways. And whatever it costs you to "get" it, says Jesus, it is well worth the price.

So, how and where do we find God's power and presence? Some think the key to discovering God is in getting mystical and "otherworldly," escaping the trappings of the world and ascending to some higher plane where God abides. But that doesn't seem to fit with Jesus' idea of the Kingdom's being uncovered in the ordinary.

Others argue that the key to the Kingdom is being good enough to gain admittance. You know, help enough old ladies across the street, donate enough money to charity and when your days are done you can enter God's Kingdom. But that seems at odds with Jesus' description of the Kingdom as a treasure found in a field, as if it's something freely given.

Jesus tells us that encountering God, experiencing God's power, and being caught up in God's love must be things we can encounter in the ordinary and access easily. Jesus' point in this parable is that he is how the Heavenly Kingdom came to Earth. In him the love of God, the power of God, and a reconciled, right relationship with God can all be received. Christ and his work on the cross are the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. And this world, this community, this church are just some the ordinary places where Jesus may be found.

It's kind of hard to believe, isn't it? And yet, we believe that when we gather here, in this sanctuary, that the greatest treasure in the history of God's universe is here for the taking! We believe that when God's Word is read here, preached here, or sung here, that Jesus is speaking to us! We believe that when you hear the words, "You are forgiven," "You are a member of God's family," or "Take this bread and drink this cup" that the power and promises of Christ are taking hold of us and doing something miraculous in us!

To be sure, by sight and sound alone this may seem like the last "field" in which you'd find something so special. This church is filled to the brim with imperfect people, and we preach a message of forgiveness and hope that to an unbelieving world sounds like absolute insanity. The apostle Paul said as much himself: "...*the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the very power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Here's another thought: What if the work of the kingdom is not only found here, but is also found in you? Think about that! If you're a baptized, believing, follower of Jesus, then the Scriptures tell us that you are a living, breathing "field," filled with the priceless treasure of Jesus. Yes, you with all your past mistakes and present problems. You are filled with the truth of Christ that can change someone else's eternity. You are filled with the Holy Spirit who's given you the same compassion and desire as Christ to bless others in need. You are part of a royal priesthood whose very presence has the power to "...*proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*" (1 Peter 2:9).

As a faithful community and as individual disciples of Jesus, we are the unlikely, ordinary, and easily accessible places where the greatest treasure in the world can be found and encountered. We - you - are the field where wandering souls may stumble upon salvation. We - you - are the marketplace of pearls for the person seeking to find Jesus. We - you - are the online auction where a hurting world can bid on trash but receive instead the astonishing treasure of forgiveness, reconciliation, and everlasting life.

Did you come here today expecting to hear a word from God and to have an encounter with the Kingdom? Are you blinded by the familiar surroundings, the same people in the same pews, and the same person speaking up front? Are you inviting others to this field to find the treasure Jesus offers? Are you extending to others the undeserved compassion of Jesus? Are you ready and willing to bear witness to seeking and wandering souls about the life-changing truth of Jesus? How rich is the treasure in your field? How lustrous is your pearl? How easy do you make it for others to see the treasure inside of you?

There's a popular show on television called *Storage Wars*. It follows a group of men and women who make their living by bidding on unopened, repossessed storage units, in the hopes of finding treasure hidden inside. They've discovered everything from classic cars and famous paintings, to the world's most valuable comic book collection, all while paying as little as \$10 to take it all home.

If you're here as the seeker or the wanderer, then what you need to know is that you have a lot in common with such modern-day treasure hunters. This morning you're sitting in a place and among people that may not seem much like you, but if you'll open yourself up, untold treasure awaits you. The kind of treasure that only God can offer. Yes, it comes at a cost. Taking ownership of all that God has in store for you through Jesus will come at the cost of confessing your brokenness and your need for a Savior. It means saying goodbye to a life of wandering and living a life following Jesus. But it will mean that your days of searching are done, and you will know peace because you are already part of God's family.

This may seem too good to be true. Or it may sound like a funny deal to you. But such sacrifice for such treasure is well worth the investment. Jesus thought so: he died to make this deal for you. Such a lop-sided deal can only be called a gift. We call it God's grace!

Some years ago, Pastor and “car-guy” Mike Ernst of Hales Corners, Wisconsin stumbled across an old 1960's, rusted and worn-out Corvette. Pastor Mike took it to his barn and began the slow work of restoration. It turns out this was no ordinary, old Corvette. It turns out that Pastor Mike's old clunker was the world famous 1962 Gulf Oil Corvette, a car that won first place 12 times in races at Daytona and other places. Ernst paid \$3,000 for the car; he later sold it at auction for \$1.485 million.

Sometimes the ordinary turns out to be extraordinary! Jesus knows there's great treasure in you, too. In fact, he died to prove it to you. Jesus loves a good deal. Jesus believes you are worth everything he had to give up, including his life, because he wants you to have the treasures of God's Kingdom. Now he asks that you be the field or the marketplace for someone else, so that they, too, may know gain the Kingdom's treasures. Free of charge!

Prayer: Gracious God, may this be a place where the treasure of Christ is easily encountered. May we find this great treasure in the ordinary places of life, and may we help others to know that the treasure of Christ is accessible, in you. And no matter what the price tag, may we recognize that it is definitely, undeniably worth the cost. Amen.

#### Sources:

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## Jesus Loves a Good Deal

Sunday, September 23, 2018

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

I think Jesus would love eBay. You know, eBay, the online garage sale where you can bid on and buy virtually anything you ever wanted but never needed? Yup, I think Jesus would love eBay. Now, to be clear, I don't believe that Jesus is an avid collector of *Star Wars* memorabilia or that he's in the market for a knock-off Gucci purse. No, I think Jesus would love eBay because Jesus loves a good deal. He's all about the joy that comes from discovering something valuable - possibly priceless - while perusing piles of seemingly ordinary items.

Morace Park, a British antiques dealer, experienced this joy: he paid \$5 on eBay for an old film container and inside he found a never-released, seven-minute movie featuring Charlie Chaplin, later valued at \$60,000.

Philip Gura, an American literature professor, experienced this joy: he paid \$481 on eBay for a photograph of the poet Emily Dickinson. This is only the second authenticated photo of Dickinson known to exist, which makes Gura's discovery priceless.

Kent Devey experienced this joy: he paid \$25 on eBay for a used BlackBerry and discovered the phone contained the numbers and e-mail addresses of 50 major celebrities, including Academy Award winners Natalie Portman and Kevin Spacey. You can bet someone paid a pretty penny for that info to be erased or the phone returned.

Lastly, Maria Ariz, a nurse from New Jersey, experienced this joy: she paid \$16 on eBay for a pair of jeans, then wrote to the seller to ask about other items, the two fell in love and got married. Now that's a good deal, and Jesus would love it!

We know this because Matthew chapter 13, with its parables about hidden treasures and pearls of great price, tells us so. A man stumbles across a fantastic treasure buried in a field. He's so excited about his discovery, so overwhelmed at its value, that he sells off every other item in his possession to purchase the land and make the treasure his own. You might call it overkill, but Jesus says, "Nope. That's a great deal!"