

Valuable Treasure and Value Systems

Matthew 13:44-45 and Matthew 6:19-21

Good Morning Church Family,

It's a joy to be together here with you this morning as we talk more about the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus proclaimed and how that kingdom still moves us and shapes us here in this room, over 2000 years later.

In 2018, a young woman in Texas was browsing a thrift store. Sitting on a shelf she found a marble bust, a sculpture from the shoulders up. The price of the sculpture was \$34 USD, about \$44 CDN. The woman was an antiques dealer, and based on the size and weight of the item, she thought it was likely quite old, perhaps quite valuable. She bought the item, displaced it on a side table in her home, and went about researching it. It took her several years to learn the story, but The bust is about 2,000 years old. Before the thrift shop, experts at the San Antonio Museum of Art say the last time it had been seen was just before the Second World War in Bavaria, a state in Germany. In the 1840s, the king of Bavaria at the time, Ludwig I, had built a palace to resemble an ancient Roman home and the bust was used as decoration in it. Experts at the San Antonio Museum of Art said an American soldier serving in the Second World War probably took it home as a souvenir and it likely ended up being donated to the second hand store by someone who didn't know its significance.

I love coming across stories like this one. There is something very satisfying about the narrative of a person, with a keen eye, coming across a treasure that everyone else overlooked. The discovery of a little gem, hidden in plain sight at value village.

This is the same sort of narrative that Jesus is offering in our parables this morning, ““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.”

Jesus is telling his disciples, and telling us, that the Kingdom of Heaven isn't obvious. It isn't a way of seeing the world that really fits with the dominant culture, the Kingdoms of the world around us. It's something different, something that you could easily overlook. But for those who have experienced the kingdom, God breaking into their reality through love, through community, through healing, through the church, through grace, through any number of the way that God chooses to reveal his immutable love to someone, then they KNOW the value of what they have found, the worth of this precious thing, just like the people in the parables.

Once, while browsing the MCC store, I came across this mug. It's clearly handmade, hand painted, and there's a little potter's stamp on the bottom. There was no price tag on the bottom, and I walked to the counter where a sweet volunteer was manning the till, "Excuse me, there's no price on this?" He took the mug, assessed it briefly. "Meh, 50 cents." You better believe I tossed two quarters on the counter and scooted out the door as quickly as possible.

Because when you find something you love, something that gives you life, something worth devoting yourself to, then you do what it takes to take hold of it. A treasure hidden in the field, a pearl (a single pearl!) of great value, a life spent loving and living in the light of Jesus. That is the essence of the Kingdom of heaven.

Further, Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a "hidden treasure" or "a pearl that a merchant searches for" not because the kingdom is some great secret, or that God's love is hidden away so that only a lucky, predestined few find it, but because to see the Kingdom of Heaven in our here and now we have to look beyond the reality in front of us.

I've read various admonishments to preachers (though I would argue this applies to all believers) that one of the main purposes of preaching and of worship is to pull back the curtain on everyday life to show that God is present, active and alive in our reality. That in the midst of making meals and cleaning messes, of tending animals and typing emails, of friendship and arguments, of the million little choices we make each day the

thread of God's love and grace is woven throughout our lives. We just need eyes to see it. I love the way that Colossians puts this idea of real life, of the real kingdom, of real, abundant life being found in Jesus is, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces ^a of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh ^b was put off when you were circumcised by ^c Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you ^d alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. ^eTherefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from

whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” Paul in Colossians is making the case that real life is now found in the kingdom of this earth, in money, security, power, or prestige. Real life is found in Jesus Christ and in living and loving our neighbors as he did in his ministry. We are alive in Christ.

For myself, I often think, “Yes, I believe and know there is a deep spiritual reality, and that God is present and active in this world, that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now, but so is laundry, so are meals, so are worries and stressors and grief. How am I supposed to peer behind the curtain? Who has time for that?” Perhaps some of you have felt that too.

Yet, when we look at the Gospels we see that Jesus built the Kingdom of Heaven, proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven in the everyday lives of people. Healing the sick. Feeding the Hungry. Even these parables that we’ve been talking through these past few weeks, stories about the Kingdom being told through the work of everyday people. A farmer sowing seed. Workers in a Harvest field. A woman making leavened bread. What is so compelling to me about Christianity, about the life of Jesus is that it is lived IN REALITY. The call of Jesus is expressed everyday. We don’t have to be a minister, a monk, or a person who takes monthly silent spiritual retreats to be a faithful person, to be immersed in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, what can we do to immerse ourselves in this? How do we keep our minds and

hearts attuned to the reality of Jesus? To find this treasure, hidden in plain sight? It's in the spiritual practice of cultivating awareness, of looking for God's hand in the world. I think many of you probably know Sharon Schultz, she's been the pastor at Eyebrow Mennonite for 18 years. Sharon told me a story about when she was the camp pastor at Elim for a week. It was a middle grades camp, so a group of 8-12 year olds. As part of the daily Bible time, she encouraged the kids to pay attention for "God Moments", as she called them. Times during their days where they felt God's presence, or saw things that reminded them that God was near. She talked about the places she saw God in her day at camp. She said the first night, when she asked, "Who had a God moment today?" many hands shot up! "Okay!", she said, "That's great! Tell me what you saw!" And all the hands went down. But she kept asking, kept encouraging the kids to keep looking, and then one evening while all the campers and Sharon were in the dining hall eating supper, a deer walked past the dining hall window, it stopped in front the of window, peered in for a while, walked around a bit, before disappearing into the bush. Guess what many kids said was their God moment that evening? And by the end of week, kids shared many of the places and spaces they had experienced God during their time at camp. It's a simple practice, but one that helps to cultivate our imagination, or ability to see God at work. I think of Peter, last Sunday, and how he shared that his blood pressure is no longer an issue and doesn't need medication for it and he said, "All glory to God!" God at work and present in our reality. The treasures of the kingdom laid out for us to find.

Author Sarah Bessey, posted a beautiful picture of the bright yellow fall leaves of birch trees in her Calgary neighborhood and wrote this, "One of the damaging things 'prophetic' charismatic culture did was set God apart from our ordinary lives as particular experiences, by invitation or appointment only. So we come to associate feelings connected with the Holy Spirit with these big emotive worship experiences of sermons that make our hair stand on end or experiences with the supernatural or secretive I'm-on-the-inside prophetic stuff. I'm not saying those things are bad, but they are incomplete.

Because the truth is that you're already connected with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is with you always, even to the end of the age, right?

And do I think the question for us now is how are we cultivating an awareness of the conversation already happening?

Look in your life as it stands for those moments when you sense God's joy or presence, however surprising. When are the moments that you are the most alive and engaged? Where are you seeing God's goodness or invitation? I often say that Spirit is hiding in plain sight in our right-now lives. I've connected with the Holy Spirit through herons and on the pathways of our neighborhood, in reading stories with the kids and in Marvel movies, in poetry and long nights of pain, in food and at protests. It's both adventure and a daily rhythm of companionship now.``

And, as we cultivate that awareness, as we stretch the boundaries of our vision and our imagination, when we see and experience the treasures of the kingdom that changes our value system. It changes what we consider a priority. I was talking with a friend once about a significant financial purchase that our family was considering. I talked about my feelings of slight guilt about spending money on something that wasn't essential. (Hint: it was our now beloved Goldendoodle puppy), and she told me, "You know, my Dad always taught me that money was a tool. A thing that is useful for building, giving and making the life you want, a tool for priorities." This wisdom from her father was especially striking because her father grew up in poverty.

Jesus tells us that these treasures of the Kingdom that we find do change us, change our priorities and our values, and that too is a kindness from the Lord. "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."

In our two parables this morning, the people are willing to give everything over to the kingdom, everything to be a part of what Jesus is doing in the world. And we are being invited into that as well. I feel daunted at the idea of saying "Here's my whole life Jesus! Here's everything I am and have and value.", so it helps me (at least) to think of it as a daily choice, a moment by moment decision to realign myself to the treasure of the kingdom. How can we respond to that question this day and this week?

In closing this morning, beloved Friends, the Kingdom of Heaven is treasure, a pearl of great price. It's a treasure that isn't always obvious, but we can cultivate the individual and communal practice of noticing the kingdom in our everyday waking, walking and working. And we can respond each day to Jesus' invitation to align our values with this valuable treasure, knowing that nothing (not even death) can take that from us. Amen.