

9th Sunday after Pentecost 2023 Matthew 13:44-58

For the last three weeks, all of chapter 13 of Matthew, we have been listening to the parables of Jesus that begin: "the kingdom of heaven is like ...". One after another they have wafted into our ears and over and over again Jesus says, "whoever has ears, let them hear" (NIV).

Today we are taking a different sort of perspective and focussing on just one parable. But firstly I think it could be helpful to go back to what was happening at the end of ch.12, just before Jesus started telling these parables, so we see who these people gathered around and about to hear all these parables are.

Ch.12 ends with him talking to this same crowd when his family asks to see him, Jesus replies, pointing at the disciples, "these are my mother and brothers, in fact all who do the will of the father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother" (my paraphrase).

Who then were gathered around Jesus to hear His parables? Sinners, heavy laden, back broken sinners. Rich tax collector sinners and poor fishermen sinners, white-collar sinners and blue-collar sinners.

The crowd is also filled with mockers and scoffers as well as the Pharisees who are not only now plotting to kill Jesus, but who have just said that Jesus' power comes from the devil – there is no more genuinely blasphemous statement.

Jesus then starts telling the kingdom parable. As I mentioned, this morning we'll focus on the first of today's parables (13:44)

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Probably due to the number of funerals we have had lately, but this parable brought to mind a picture I saw of a painting of Jesus coming and claiming his hidden treasure, a human soul, from a cemetery (I can't remember where I saw it or who painted it). The text under it was today's parable.

It is a beautiful image of the kingdom of heaven invading this world. So let's picture the field being a cemetery with its scattered stones, and the man coming to claim his hidden treasure is Jesus. The parable says that "in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Holy Scripture sometimes contains the most understated truths. When it says that He sold "all he had," Looking at the man in the parable as Jesus, the "all he had" was His very life, given for us, "Not with gold or silver," as we are told, "but with His holy, precious blood."

This is how Jesus buys the field. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus "for the *joy* that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

So the man stands in the field, in that cemetery, and he pulls out a treasure with His mighty nail pierced hands. The thing I like about this way of looking at this parable as it shows just how much we contribute to our citizenship of the kingdom of heaven, (our salvation), which is not at all. We were dead.

We were dead in our sin. Think on this, remember Paul's words to the Ephesians, "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:4-6)

Jesus looks at the sinners gathered around Him and calls them his "brother and sister and mother." They are a treasure to him, because he will die for them, they are family to him, they are friends to him. In the crowd was the disciple John, who later wrote in his gospel that "greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

Ps 116:15 says How precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of one of his saints. Who is the precious treasure buried in the field? You are, you are precious because of Jesus' precious blood shed for you, washed over and symbolised in our baptism.

Even in our death we are a treasure to God because he loves us. This is what the kingdom of heaven is like.

This man who bought the field with everything he had loves you with every slash of the whip on his back and with every thorn and nail. It is by these very wounds that we are healed, he healed us all!

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. The man who bought the field with everything he had loved you when he told this parable, and he loves you as you sit here together today. He loves us as we listen to his words, however they may find us.

We remember this great love as we come into communion with our Lord and each other through his crucified and risen body and blood, with the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our soul.

The English language itself helps us see this picture. The words "coffin" and "casket" are derived from the same words that are used for containers of wealth. As in "his coffers are full are full of gold."

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. I am treading delicately here as the image is confronting, but in our coffin, in our urn, we will lie a baptised child of God, a sheep in the Good Shepherd's sheepfold, The merchant's pearl of great value, the sower's wheat which will shine like the sun when it is harvested.

So we lie as buried treasure in the man's field bought by selling *all* that he has. Now we can't take our treasure with us, money and houses and things, but the treasure of heaven is different,

Jesus takes you, his treasure, with him wherever he goes. Jesus says, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3)

What points to Christ's love for us is not only his payment for our sins through his personal sacrifice, but also the reality of what he considers valuable. He treasures not gold or silver, but the sinful, the lost, the dregs of humanity, the rotting, the forgotten, the discarded for convenience, the destroyed by design, the consumed by disease, the consumed by sorrow.

I heard the world described the other day as this 'great mess of ugliness'. Well this 'mess of ugliness' is what Jesus treasures. It is precious to him because he has redeemed it.

Jesus says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Not only did Christ Jesus buy the field with everything he has, but he also enfolds us in his arms and holds us to himself when we come to him. This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. Whoever has ears, let them hear. Let me pray ...