

## Matthew 13:44-52

Pentecost 9; August 30 & 31, 2023

In 2013, a couple living in Northern California, noticed something strange while walking their dog on their land; a weird bit of metal poking out of the mud. After rooting around, they dug up several ancient-looking tin cans, filled not with rotten peaches or miraculously preserved spam, but gold coins. The eight cans they dug up contained 1,427 near-mint 18th-century gold coins. The couple, who have remained anonymous for fear that their land will be overrun, were told that the coins they found were worth \$10 million dollars. They weren't even looking for treasure, but they discovered a great treasure completely by accident.

Jamie Hill's friends thought that he was nuts the first time he went into debt searching for emeralds in North Carolina. Hill, 38, has been searching for treasure since he was a child. After dropping out of college and drifting through a number of jobs, he went back to his first love, looking for gems. But he had gone through \$200,000. He was so far in debt, that he was getting ready to take a factory job when he made the 1998 discovery. Hill made headlines when he found an 88-carat emerald in a dormant family mine in Hiddenite, N.C. in November 1998, after years of mostly fruitless searching. It was a massive gem that would be worth more than a million dollars. That emerald would eventually be given the name of the name: "The Carolina Prince." That wasn't the only gem that was discovered in that mine. He had found the great treasure that he had been looking for all his life.

Both of the men in Jesus' parables that he told today are like these two men who had found great treasure. One was searching for treasure and one was not. Both, however, found great treasure. Let us take a closer look at these parables of Jesus. **"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."**

In ancient times, the rich often divided their wealth into three parts: 1. The first part was for doing business; 2. The second part was converted into precious gems to provide portable wealth in case the rich needed to flee; 3. The third part was set aside to be buried in a safe place so that no matter what happened, they could always return and retrieve their money from its hiding place. However, sometimes people would die before they could come and retrieve their treasure. Their wealth would remain hidden until another accidentally discovered it. This is the scenario that Christ put forth to his disciples. The man who found it hadn't been looking for it; this windfall came out of nowhere. Immediately, the man sells all he has to acquire that field and the treasure within.

The second parable is about a priceless pearl. That may not strike our ears like it would have struck the ears of Jesus' audience. Today pearls are farmed commercially and harvested naturally with little effort. But in the days of the Roman empire, pearls were held in such high esteem that people would pay unbelievable sums for a pearl they considered to be perfect. For example, it was said that a Roman general financed an entire military campaign with one single pearl. When Jesus speaks of a pearl of great value, his audience didn't think of Grandma's string of pearls that she wore on special Sundays. They thought of a pearl of unbelievable amount of wealth. The man in Jesus' parable had found the treasure he had been looking for. He had found a treasure that was worth so much that he was willing to spend everything he had to get this treasure.

Both of the men in the parables found great treasure. For one it was a complete surprise, as unexpected as it was valuable. For the other it came from an expert search by a discerning man. Before they found these new treasures, both men no doubt valued what they previously owned. But once they saw this new treasure, see how little they valued all else they had. That's what the kingdom of heaven does. It puts everything else into perspective. The spiritual wealth of Christ and his Gospel puts everything else into perspective, doesn't it?

As God's people, we have a different view of life. This treasure changes peoples' lives. It's fun to Jesus' love flowing through people. This past week, I was up near Crivitz in northern Wisconsin at the Lutheran Girl Pioneer National Camp. When a younger camper was feeling sad, another older one would jump into action. You would see Jesus' loving through them. On Thursday morning, *Kids Connection* was heard to record material for a story about the LGP Camp. For those who may not be familiar with *Kids Connection*, it is a kids version of the *WELS Connection*. It was fun watching them do

interviews of several different young people. Some of them were really good interviews. In fact, Steve Boettcher, the man who was doing the interviews and recording, was really impressed with these young ladies. He said that it was going to be hard to edit and produce a final product because they interviewed well. Standing behind the camera and listening to them, I had the impression. It was incredible to listen to them talk about their faith and how that had shaped their experiences at Camp over the years. I look forward to seeing the final segment to be aired next year. Jesus changes your and my life, doesn't it? Jesus is the one who gives life value. When we have Jesus, we really have everything don't we?

This treasure of Jesus is the one thing that gives direction for a day and hope for your eternity. It is the one thing that makes it all worthwhile. Jesus has taken that treasure and placed into your heart, whether you stumbled into him or were looking for him. When we have Jesus, we have everything. This message is not just for you, but for all.

That brings us to the third parable that Jesus tells today. **“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** There is a day coming when God will throw his net into this world. People will be gathered up. The believers and unbelievers will be separated. Those that have Jesus, the treasure, in their hearts, they will spend an eternity in heaven. It's a treasure for you and a treasure to bring you home, your eternal home. May God give us the strength to treasure this treasure forever. Amen.