

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 26, 2020  
“The Priceless Treasure” (Matthew 13:31-33, 44-54)

Our gospel text for this morning encourages us to look at what our most priceless treasure is. What *do* you and I prize the most? For some of us, it may be our family or our closest friends. Nothing is more important than spending time with those we love and care for most. For some, it may be our career. We truly enjoy the work we do and the affirmation we receive when we perform well. For others it may be a possession that our hard work and long hours have helped us obtain: the car we’ve always wanted, our dream home, a vacation home in the mountains or at the beach, the best equipment to play golf or another sport, stylish clothes and expensive jewelry.

But if we ask someone who has been impacted by COVID 19, who has lost their home to fire or flood, who is living with a terminal illness, their answers would be a lot different. It’s all a matter of perspective.

But this morning, Jesus tells us that there is something far more priceless than possessions, even more priceless than the love of family and friends. After all, our possessions won’t last forever. Our spouse – through death or divorce – will leave us. Our children will grow up and leave home. Friends will come and go. And there is a good chance that there will be times when both friends and family disappoint us.

What then is the greatest treasure? Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is the one and only thing that is priceless. There is nothing else that begins to compare with it. It is more valuable than your business, your beautiful home, your cars, your good looks and personality, even your family. And the good news is that the kingdom of heaven exists for you and me.

But what is it that makes the kingdom of heaven so priceless? In several parables, Jesus tells us about God’s eternal reign of love and why it is such a treasure. So, what can we learn from these parables?

First, the kingdom is both a present and future reality. We can experience it now and look forward to experiencing it in the life to come. The kingdom of heaven will not rust out, wear out, or die. It may seem as inconspicuous and inconsequential as a mustard seed. Yet, like a mustard seed and like yeast, it can bring about amazing things. The mustard seed produces the greatest shrub and yeast can affect a whole loaf of bread. No matter how vast the world, God’s reign is supreme and his kingdom can transform lives.

Second, the kingdom is in the hearts of believers. A number of years ago, my sister underwent brain surgery. The news that she needed the surgery came at a time when everything in her life seemed to be going great and on track. I don’t ever recall hearing her ask, *Why me?* or *Why is this happening now?* In fact, her attitude and behavior through the whole ordeal seemed to ask the opposite question: *Why NOT me?*

You’ve known people like this in your lives, I’m sure. Because of their trust and faith in God, they have been able to rise above a tragic setback – and even grow from it. And those close to them grow, as well. You see, the kingdom of heaven is priceless in spite of our suffering

because the reign of God is in the hearts of believers. This means that God will be with us in our suffering. In the kingdom of heaven, we are transformed from fearful people to courageous people. We can have hope and peace of mind even in tragic times.

The Apostle Paul reinforces this when he writes, *We know that in everything God works good for those who love the Lord.*

Third, the kingdom is hidden joy. Even though God's reign may seem ordinary, when it comes, it comes unexpectedly and with great joy. In fact, it comes with so much joy that it's worth sacrificing everything we have for it. Jesus compares it to a treasure hidden in a field, which a worker finds and covers up. Then in his joy, he sells all that he has to buy that field. He also compares it to a pearl of great value. A merchant finds it and sells everything to buy it. In these two parables, both men sacrifice everything to obtain their discovered treasure because it brings such joy.

The kingdom of heaven brings such joy, as well. But it is not a joy dependent on external things such as wealth or worldly possessions or even relationships. It is a joy hidden deep within us: the joy of knowing that we are loved by God and are sustained by his grace.

Fourth, the kingdom of heaven is costly. Both the worker and the merchant have to sell everything to possess the treasure and the pearl. And we know the kingdom of heaven cost Jesus his very life. But often times we forget this. Although we are told repeatedly about God's abounding love and the salvation he freely gives to us, we take this good news for granted. The kingdom is a gift to us, yes, but our response to that gift requires everything we have – including our lives. Jesus tells us plainly that if we want to be his disciples we must take up our cross and follow him.

This tells me that we are to raise the bar on what discipleship means to us. Is it enough that we are a member of a church? Or that we give some of our time to the church serving as an usher, singing in the choir, or serving on a ministry team? It's not enough for Christ, and it's not enough for any of us either.

Deep within each of us, I believe, is a longing, a desire, a searching for something more. You and I want to find something in life that is so wonderful, so meaningful, so fulfilling and satisfying, that we'll give ourselves to it in total commitment. I don't think any one of us is afraid to suffer or sacrifice if we find something we think is worth it. And the kingdom of heaven is certainly worth it.

My daughter, Katie, was a cheerleader in middle and high school. She found great joy in it and it was very rewarding for her. But there was a cost. It required dedication and commitment. There was practice for several hours each day, new stunts and routines for her to learn, games that required her attendance, and several cheerleading competitions each year.

As we soon found out, it was almost a year-round commitment. And in order to spend all that time and energy to participate in something she really enjoyed, there were sacrifices she had to make. She had to give up time with family, time with friends, time devoted to studying, time

sleeping. She even gave up a family vacation to Florida one summer. But because it was important to her, and because it was rewarding, she was willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

That's what the kingdom of heaven can be like for us. It's that one thing that satisfies all our longings, the thing that brings joy we can find nowhere else, the treasure for which we're willing to sacrifice everything.

So, in that sense, just coming to church or giving a small portion of our time is not enough. The kingdom of heaven requires commitment and dedication. We are called to be Christ's hands and feet in the world. We are called to be witnesses of God's grace and messengers who bring the good news of God's eternal love into the world. Yes, the kingdom of heaven is costly, but the rewards are greater than we can imagine.

Finally, the kingdom is based on love. The final parable Jesus tells is about a net thrown into the sea to catch fish of every kind. This tells us that the kingdom of heaven is for all people, no matter who we are. It is not dependent upon our economic standing, our nationality, our social class, or our age. Those who enter God's eternal kingdom are those who respond to the needs of others out of their love for God. Jesus will say to them:

*Come, you that are blessed by my Father;  
inherit the kingdom prepared for you;  
for I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,  
I was naked and you gave me clothing,  
I was sick and you took care of me,  
I was in prison and you visited me.*

We experience the kingdom of heaven – God's reign of love – when we are close to God and neighbor, living out our love for Christ.

The kingdom of heaven is priceless. Whatever treasure we have, the kingdom of heaven is much more valuable. No matter how happy we are in our marriage, no matter how great our health or our career, no matter how many places we've traveled, if we miss out on the kingdom of heaven, we miss out on the one thing whose value exceeds all others.

God's eternal reign of love now and forever is priceless. It is priceless because it transforms lives, gives meaning even in suffering, brings forth great joy that is not dependent on external things, and is costly. Best of all, it is God's gift to you and me. May we live in the kingdom now and for all eternity. And all God's people say, Amen.