

The 7th Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: July 30, 2017

Proper 12: Matthew 13: 31-33: *So, What is The Kingdom of God worth to you?*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field,” said Jesus. “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.” My brothers and sisters, the Kingdom of God that Jesus founded on this earth is an ‘already and not yet entity’. The kingdom and our responses to the Kingdom of God have a hidden quality in the present time, but everything will be made clear in the end of days, both our responses and the great value of the kingdom. The question this week is simple, “so what is the Kingdom of God worth to you?”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, what is Jesus saying to us about the Kingdom of Heaven? Obviously in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom of God is to be greatly prized. Jesus is saying that a fulfilling life only comes to those who have determined what really matters in this world and then give everything they have to pursuing that one thing.

If there is one thing in life that matters more than anything else, it would make sense to focus upon on that one thing and make it the single most important priority in our lives. That's the way to have a successful life. Of course, some people have difficulty deciding what is most important.

A man went to the sheriff's department to report a missing person. "My wife is missing," he reported to the desk sergeant. "She went shopping yesterday and has not come home." The sergeant asked: "What is her height?" The man said, "Gee, I'm not sure. A little over five feet tall, I suppose." The sergeant asked, "What about her weight?" The man looked helpless. "Don't know," he said. "Not slim, not really fat." The sergeant asked, "What's the color of her eyes?" The man answered, "Never noticed." "The color of her hair?" the sergeant asked. "It changes a couple times a year," said the man. "Maybe dark brown." "What was she wearing?" the sergeant asked. "Could have been a skirt or shorts," said the man. "I don't remember exactly." The sergeant

asked, “What kind of car did she go in?” The man said, “She went in my truck.” “What kind of truck is it?” the sergeant asked. The man smiled and said, “It’s a brand new 2017 Ford F150 King Ranch 4X4. It has custom leather seats and ‘Bubba’ floor mats. It has a heavy duty towing package with a gold hitch, On Star Navigation, a 21-channel CB radio, six cup holders, and four power outlets.” Then he paused for a moment. “My wife put a small scratch on the driver’s door,” he said. At this point the husband started to choke up and become dewy eyed. “Don’t worry,” the sergeant reassured him sympathetically. “We’ll find your truck.”

Everybody has their own set of priorities of what is important in their life. If you have never been to the Special Olympics at URI, I would encourage you to do so. Several years ago, I watched a T-ball game at the Special Olympics. On one of the T-ball teams, there was a young special needs woman named Tracy. Tracy limped and she couldn’t hit the ball at all. But everyone cheered for her anyway. It was her team’s last game and Tracy came up to bat. She swung at the ball and quite miraculously she hit it. The coach yelled for her to run to first base. Then he yelled for her to keep going toward second, then toward third base. By this time we were all on our feet cheering Tracy turned toward home plate. But as she neared home plate, something truly wondrous happened. An old dog moseyed onto the field, plopped himself down next to

the third base line and between home plate. Moments away from her first home run, Tracy stopped dead in her tracks, knelt in the dirt beside the dog, and gave him a big hug. Tracy never made it to home plate, but the crowd screamed, whistled and cheered her anyway. Tracy showed everyone what was really important to her, and it wasn't winning at T-ball.

So, my brothers and sisters, what's it worth to you? What is most important to you? What is it that you care most about? You know, sometimes we become confused when we read Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God. Just remember that the Kingdom of God simply means allowing God to rule over your life. When you open yourself to God and ask God to take charge of your life and allow God to make whatever changes in your life need to be made in order for you to become all God created you to be, then you discover that sense of purpose, you gain that sense of perspective, and you develop that deep appreciation and gratitude for all that God has given you. That is the essence of happiness.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, so many people today living in this country, swimming in the waters of this very secular culture are trying to live without God. Money, power and arrogance have given many people the myopic illusion that they are doing well. Many are quite cheerful as long as

life is going their way. After 9/11, people were on their knees praying in churches all over the country, proudly flying the flag from their homes, a congress set aside bipartisan politics to sing “America” on the steps of our nation’s capital. Everyone was shaken to the core. But we are a nation of people who forget quickly. We have long term attention deficit disorder. Our country has the attention span of a gnat. All is quickly forgotten. We quickly forget the God we turn to in crisis and only take God off the shelf when we absolutely must, so we can quickly return to cheerfulness, but happiness always remains elusive without God in our life. Ultimately there is no joy and no lasting happiness without God. Trusting God, and giving God control of your life, is the key to victory in every situation. It doesn’t mean that everything in life will always turn out the way you want it. But giving control of your life to God will give you strength to find meaning and purpose in every situation.

My sisters and brothers, trusting God, let go and let God control your life, is the rock on which to build a joy-filled and happy life. There is no treasure in this world comparable to knowing that, whatever life may send you, you are in God’s hands and you are never alone and God loves you forever.

Maybe you know the story of a young black girl from Birmingham, AL who was determined to become a figure skater and a concert pianist. This was in the 1960s when Birmingham was not exactly conducive to such dreams for an African-American child. Her parents, who themselves had dreams for her, named her with an Italian musical term that means to play “with sweetness.” Well, Sweetness discovered at a young age the cruel legacy of Jim Crow racism. As a young lady she was not allowed to use the dressing room of a local department store because it was reserved for whites only. Her family attempted to eat at a restaurant after the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. They were greeted with silence and stares. Some people would have become bitter, but not Sweetness. It only made her more determined. It was her faith in God that made the difference. She trusted God. She says she “approached each setback, each insult, and each failure as part of the wonderful script that God was writing with her.” She didn’t make it as a professional figure skater. Nor did she earn renown as a concert pianist because God had something better in mind for Sweetness.

On September 11, 2001, a voice on the telephone informed President George W. Bush that the United States was under attack. It was the voice of the woman who, at the time, may have been the most powerful woman in America. As she informed the president of the attack she implemented

emergency procedures to protect the president and his staff. She also assured the leaders of the world that the United States government was still up and running. It was the voice of the young lady from Alabama whose name in Italian means to play “with sweetness.” You and I know her as Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State of the United States, still one of the most respected women in our nation. She credits her parents, of course. But more than anything else she credits her faith in God. Truly that faith has been a treasure for her surpassing the value of anything else in life. My dear sisters in brothers in Christ, so what is the Kingdom of God worth in your life? This week I challenge you reflect upon the Christ who offers us this same treasure today, and that is the treasure of the Kingdom of God at work in our lives. I think St. Patrick’s Breastplate Prayer points the way to our happiness,

**Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.**

This treasure is worth selling everything else in your life in order to purchase it. But the Kingdom of God is a free gift. All you have to do is open your heart

to Christ's kingdom today and simply receive the gift of God's happiness.

Amen.