

Sermon for July 30, 2023 – The 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 13:44-52 EHV

Theme: The Kingdom of Heaven...

- 1) Is a hidden treasure.
- 2) Is the end of your search.
- 3) Catches all kinds but only keeps the good.
- 4) Offers old and new blessings to address your needs.

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid again. In his joy, he goes away and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one very valuable pearl, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸When the net was filled, they pulled it onto the shore. They sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹That is how it will be at the end of the world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous who are among them. ⁵⁰And they will throw the wicked into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ⁵¹Jesus said to them, “Did you understand all these things?”

They answered him, “Yes.”

⁵²He said to them, “Therefore every expert in the law who has been trained as a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure both new things and old things.”

All people are searching for the one thing that will bring peace, meaning, and happiness to their lives. Some think material wealth will grant them these blessings. Others imagine they can attain them through humanitarian efforts. Every religion attempts to acquire them, but they can only be received in one place from one person: from God in his Kingdom!

With Jesus as our guide, let us learn four truths about his kingdom, its blessings, and how he wants us to receive it, under the theme: **The Kingdom of Heaven...**

- 1) Is your hidden treasure.
- 2) Is the end of your search.
- 3) Catches all kinds but only keeps the good.
- 4) Offers old and new blessings to address your needs.

Part One: The Kingdom of Heaven is a hidden treasure.

Before we proceed with our text, we need to answer the question, what is the kingdom of heaven? Well, let me ask another question to help us understand that concept: what is Canada? Is it merely the geographical land mass stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the 49th Parallel to the most northerly islands on Earth? Or would you define Canada differently - pointing to our country's unique history, cultural diversity, system of government, and way of thinking that is

unique in the world? The concept of Canada is really a combination of all those things: place, people, culture, and mindset. And if this is true about an earthly country like Canada, how more so about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is more than just the place where God lives; it is also his ruling activity in the hearts of believers. To belong to the Kingdom of Heaven is to live in a state of forgiveness and reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus. It means that God considers you a citizen of heaven for Jesus' sake – granting you all the rights, privileges, responsibilities, and protections such citizenship entails. Members of Christ's kingdom think differently than their earthly neighbours. Instead of seeking their interests, pleasures, and glory on this earth, they seek those of Jesus, who has rescued us from our empty way of life and the hell we deserved for our sins.ⁱ

The kingdom of heaven is a genuinely remarkable treasure - purchased for us by Christ himself. It is a new, restored relationship with God that not only offers us hope for a better future but purpose, meaning, peace, and protection now as we live as foreigners in this world, waiting for Christ to take us to our everlasting home with God in paradise.

Because of all these blessings, Jesus says: ⁴⁴*“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid again. In his joy, he goes away and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

Take a moment to picture the scene. A treasure lies in the field for anyone to take, but people pass it by unknowingly. Such is the kingdom of heaven. God's Word is within every Canadian's reach: sitting on shelves in bookstores and libraries across our country and freely available on the internet. The treasure of Christ's forgiving love is there for all to find and receive, but people pass it by unwittingly. Why? Because, consumed with their own thoughts about life, they neither notice it nor perceive its worth when they happen upon it.

Thankfully the LORD will not let his treasure remain hidden. Using the natural law he placed in every human heart, God moves people to search for relief from the guilt and shame they feel over their sins. Those who do not seek relief from themselves but from God are like the man in the parable whose eyes are open, looking for a treasure.

And what happens when such a person perceives the treasure of the Gospel? He takes every precaution never to lose it again. Like the man who immediately sold everything he had to buy the whole field so there can be no doubt that the treasure belongs to him, the newly converted Christian single-mindedly pursues Christ – willingly giving up everything to not lose the great, everlasting treasure we find in Jesus.

Notice the man's attitude as he sells everything to purchase the field. There is no hint of hesitation, regret, or compulsion but pure joy. Why? Because he knows the value of the treasure.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you have that same joy in Christ's kingdom as the man had in his treasure? Do you understand that – in Christ – you have everything you need: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? Are you willing to give up everything for Jesus – not out of compulsion, but joyfully? Can you confess with the Apostle Paul: *“I consider everything to be a loss because*

of what is worth far more: knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have lost all things and consider them rubbish, so that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, which comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God by faith.”ⁱⁱ

I think we all have failed in this regard, haven't we? We often let the world influence us - falling for the devil's lies as he tempts us to seek happiness, purpose, and peace away from Christ. In doing this, we become fools who willingly give up gold for plastic and diamonds for glass.

So how do we avoid acting so foolishly? By keeping our eyes fixed on the treasure itself. Keep looking to Jesus in repentance and faith—believing he has forgiven all your sins. Dig into the treasure of the Gospel, for the more you do that, the more you will rejoice in it because you know your search is over.

Part Two: The Kingdom of Heaven is the end of your search.

⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls. As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, all people are searching for the one thing that will bring peace, meaning, and happiness to their lives. Their consciences testify that there is a God: that their lives are more than just a series of chemical reactions. Yes, all people are searching, but most do not know what they are looking for, so their search is aimless. They settle for things that offer no actual value until they get bored of them and continue their search. However, the person in whom the Holy Spirit has awakened repentance and faith is like a wise merchant. He knows what he is looking for: the one who will bring true peace, meaning, and happiness to his life.*

⁴⁶ *When he found one very valuable pearl, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. The kingdom of heaven is the end of our search. Nothing has more excellent value or worth! Only Jesus' forgiveness can soothe our guilt-ridden souls. Only our reconciled relationship with God through faith in Jesus gives our lives true purpose, meaning, and joy. Our search ended when the Holy Spirit called us to faith in Jesus. Don't fall for the fake beads meant to mimic pearls offered by the devil and his allies. To possess Jesus through faith is to possess life itself, as St. John says: *The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*ⁱⁱⁱ That is why the wise merchant and the man in the field were willing to give up everything to possess Jesus, the great pearl and treasure of our souls.*

Part Three: The Kingdom of Heaven catches all kinds, but only keeps the good.

Now that we understand the tremendous value God's kingdom has for us, we are led to wonder what kind of people belong to it. Jesus' following parable tells us: ⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.*

Fish don't willingly swim into nets, but nets catch fish; in the same way, people don't willingly swim into Christ's kingdom, but Jesus catches people with his Gospel. What kind of people does Christ's Gospel catch? All kinds of people. The Bible does not discriminate against ethnicity, age,

gender, or physical or mental infirmity. The kingdom of heaven is for all and, therefore, catches all types of people. What a comfort it is to know this fact about the Gospel: because it does not discriminate against anyone, it doesn't discriminate against me.

Having said that, Jesus does talk about a necessary sorting that will take place at the end of time: ⁴⁸*When the net was filled, they pulled it onto the shore. They sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but threw the bad ones away. ⁴⁹That is how it will be at the end of the world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous who are among them. ⁵⁰And they will throw the wicked into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

It's essential to note that the fish are not sorted according to their "type" but according to whether they are good or bad. The term translated as "bad" literally means decaying or rotting. In other words, God's kingdom does not discriminate based on who a person is (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) but only based on whether the person is spiritually alive or dead.

This invites the question: who are the rotting fish? They are the hypocrites: people who outwardly claim to love Christ but have no genuine faith. Only God knows who these people are because only he can see into the heart. But Jesus wants all of us to take warning: if we don't meditate on His word and treasure our salvation, our faith will die. We would become like the rotting fish caught in the net: present but not alive and destined to be disposed of with everything worthless and corrupt.

Part Four: The Kingdom of Heaven offers old and new blessings to address your needs.

After speaking these parables, Jesus asked his disciples: *"Did you understand all these things?" They answered him, "Yes." ⁵²He said to them, "Therefore every expert in the law who has been trained as a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure both new things and old things."*

As His disciples, Jesus wants us to use the entire treasury of teachings His Kingdom offers, not just pick and choose the things we like. Why is that important? Because every prophecy, command, teaching, and promise in God's Word exists for a purpose: to lead, encourage, or strengthen our faith in Christ for our lives on this earth as his servants.

To explain why this is important, let's talk about vegetables. Most children would like to avoid vegetables as much as possible, yet the vitamins and minerals they contain are essential for our health. Similarly, there are teachings of the Bible that we might not like as much as others because they are too hard to learn or complicated to understand. We might avoid these teachings because we don't see how they are relevant to our present lives. But there is a point to these teachings – even if we don't understand them now. God uses them to feed us with what we need to bless both us and others through us. Sometimes that blessing doesn't happen immediately, but in the future, when some experience makes what we studied in the past "click." And as we enter the treasury of the Kingdom by studying God's Word, we find a lot more to love. We see that the kingdom not only gives us hope for the future but helps us for our here and now.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: rejoice that God has graciously made you a disciple in his Kingdom. Pursue Christ as your great hidden treasure. Understand that He is the end of your search for peace, purpose, and joy. Remember that even though Christ's kingdom welcomes and catches all types of people, it only keeps those whose faith is alive. Therefore, prayerfully dig into His Word with joy – partaking in the old and new blessings he gives you through it to sustain and strengthen your faith until he returns on the Last Day. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. 1 Peter 1:18-21

ⁱⁱ Philippian 3:7b-9 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 John 5:12 EHV