

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, July 30th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Pearl
Proper 12
Matthew 13:44-46

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

for he is our God
**and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

O God, our guide and guardian,
you have led us apart from the busy world into the quiet of your house.
Grant us grace to worship you in spirit and in truth,
to the comfort of our souls
and the upbuilding of every good purpose and holy desire.
Enable us to do more perfectly the work to which you have called us,
that we may not fear the coming of night,
when we shall surrender into your hands
the tasks which you have committed to us.
So may we worship you not with our lips only at this hour,
but in word and deed all the days of our lives,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn #290: "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes;
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting and silent as light,
 nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
 thy justice like mountains high soaring above
 thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
 in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
 we blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree,
 and wither, and perish; but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
 thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
 all laud we would render: oh help us to see
 'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
 Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

O Lord, great God,
 all holy, Father most gracious,
 filled with mercy and steadfast love,
 we are embarrassed to come before you,
 for we have preferred the ways of this world to your ways,
 for we have rebelled against your wisdom
 and we have gotten into trouble,
 for we have rejected your fatherly guidance
 and have gotten lost altogether.
 To you belongs righteousness, O Lord,
 and to us confusion of face.
 O Lord, great God,
 all holy, filled with awe,
 Father, most gracious,
 filled with mercy and steadfast love,
 incline your ear to our troubles.
 Hear us when we pour out our sorrows before you.
 Forgive us,
 not on the ground of our own righteousness,
 but on the ground of your great mercy.
 On the ground of your great mercy
 in the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ.
 It is in his name that we pray,
 for he is our Savior and the mediator of the covenant of grace. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Know that in Jesus,
 God embraces you, forgives you,
 and strengthens you to live a renewed life

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading**Psalm 119:129-136**

¹²⁹ Your testimonies are wonderful;
 therefore my soul keeps them.

¹³⁰ **The unfolding of your words gives light;
 it imparts understanding to the simple.**

¹³¹ I open my mouth and pant,
 because I long for your commandments.

¹³² **Turn to me and be gracious to me,
 as is your way with those who love your name.**

¹³³ Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
 and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

¹³⁴ **Redeem me from man's oppression,
 that I may keep your precepts.**

¹³⁵ Make your face shine upon your servant,
 and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶ **My eyes shed streams of tears,
 because people do not keep your law.**

Children's Hymn #461: "Be Thou My Vision"

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
 Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
 Thou my best thought, by day or by night
 Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word
 I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
 Thou my great Father, thine own may I be,
 Thou in me dwelling and I one with Thee.

Be Thou my Breastplate, my Sword for the fight;
 be Thou my whole Armor, be Thou my true Might;
 be Thou my soul's Shelter, be Thou my strong Tow'r,
 O raise Thou me heav'nward, great Pow'r of my pow'r.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
 be Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
 be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart,
 O High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,
 O grant me its joys, after vict'ry is won;
 Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
 still be Thou my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination **(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

Matthew 13:44-46

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Sermon

Today we are looking at two of the parables that appear in the stream of parables within the book of Matthew which are known as the parables of the kingdom. These two parables, the treasure, and the pearl, focus on the value of faith and the eternal life that we receive through God's grace. The focus of both of these parables is not the fact that the pearl or treasure are hidden and hard to find, but instead the value of the pearl

or treasure that was found. When we study these parables, we should naturally be asking ourselves, 'why were these people in the parables willing to give up so much, all that they have, to attain that pearl or that treasure?' Then we have to examine our own life and discover what we value above all else and what we love so much that we would be willing to give up all to have.

The first parable is incredibly simple. A man finds a treasure out in a field. He wants the treasure, so he sells everything he has, all of it, and uses that money to buy the field so that the treasure belongs to him.

Parables are meant to be examples of Biblical truths given in a worldly form so that we can better understand them. They were never meant to be interpreted literally, but instead we are to take the event from the parable and based on our understanding of what is happening in worldly terms and our knowledge of God we should be able to understand what Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of heaven.

So, to better understand this parable we need to set aside the idea of some man roaming through random people's back yards looking for treasures so that he can buy their land and make himself rich. After all what kind of treasure could he possibly find in the middle of a field that could possibly be worth everything that he had? How many of us have all of our valuables buried behind the house? I am guessing no one.

However, remember that in the days when this parable was taught that there were no real banks. When you had anything of value, whether it was coins or something else of value, it was usually hidden somewhere in the home. However, when a threat was near, like an invading army or a rebellion or revolution, people would often take the valuable that they had out of the home and bury them on a piece of property, sometimes one they owned, sometimes even on properties that they did not own.

Also remember that at this time towns and villages were quite small and whole towns could be wiped out by an invading army or even by a disease that was ravaging the land. Because of this it was not exactly common, but it was also not unheard of finding a treasure that someone had hidden, sometimes decades earlier, in a field because they had died before returning to dig up their treasures.

So, when Jesus told this parable, people understood that what he was talking about was entirely possible even if not something that they had experienced. They could relate to the parable. Anyone who is interested in history knows that this phenomenon of finding buried treasure in the middle of random fields still happens today. Just last year in Poland some treasure hunters dug up four tons of gold which Hitler's army had looted from the people of the village and buried in a field behind the brothel they often visited. So even in our day, finding buried treasure in a field is not unheard of, but also is not a common occurrence.

So, we can understand why this man is willing to go out and sell everything he owns, all he has with joy, to buy a field in which he found a treasure of great value. To give you an idea of the value of buried treasure, that four tons of gold that was found in Southern Poland has a value of roughly \$228, 160, 333. I am sure many of us would gladly sell everything we own to buy a field in which there was a treasure of that value.

The second parable was also something simple that many of the people of the time could understand. They all knew someone who made their living buying and selling something. In the parables case it is a man who buys and sells pearls. Until one day he finds a pearl of such perfection that he is willing to sell everything he has, his whole stock, to just possess that one pearl.

Again, this is not unheard of in the modern world. This is the basis of almost every pawn shop, collectable comic, and card store. People hunt through other people's possessions in search of the rare piece that has value to the collector and not necessarily society.

Treasures of high value, often found in unexpected places. This is the first lesson that we are taught from the parable. The grace of God is not easily seen and found by everyone; it is however not hidden away in someplace where it is impossible for anyone to find. It is in a place that may require a little searching and some sacrifice to find.

This is why it is so hard for so many people in this world to find and to understand the Word of God. The majority of people in this world search for things of value based upon worldly values, they look at what is immediately visible on the surface level. They look for things of beauty, power, and monetary value, things which benefit them in the here and now. They seek out people who are articulate, polished, and presentable, the people of fame and power, and these are the ones they idolize, not the meek and humble follower of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that it is normal everyday people that God has chosen as his people. God chose those who will be considered weak in this world to be part of his kingdom.

There is a scene in C.S. Lewis's Screwtape letters where Screwtape tells his nephew that one of the easiest ways that he can convince people to not become Christians is by

showing him the people at a church. He says to show them the people in their wrinkled clothing, with messy hair and bad breath and that will dissuade anyone from attending church.

The whole point being that we cannot judge Christians by appearances, Christian's come from all walks of life, all cultural backgrounds, all social backgrounds, and all economic backgrounds. Only a fool would think to judge a whole religion and all of its truths by the appearance of some of that religion's followers. Yet, this is exactly what many people in this world do every day. They look upon the few who claim Christianity and yet do not walk in the faith and judge the whole body of Christ based off the actions of those few.

Muhammad Gandhi made this very mistake. When he was turned away from a church in India, he gave up following Christ, not because of the Bible, not because of the sacrifice, but because of people who claimed to be Christian.

Gandhi was like many other people who look at the field of Christian faith and only saw the dirt on the surface and then decided that there is nothing of value in it for them.

The pearl of great value is also hidden in an easily found place. Think of the parable the man traded in pearls, he sees them each and every day. Which means the many people he does business with also see them each and every day, but they had become so used to seeing these things of value every day that they no longer recognized their value.

For many of us this could be similar to how we do not recognize our own ease of life until we go somewhere where all of our conveniences are removed.

This is what has happened with God's Word. With modern technology, you can hear and see God's Word being preached and taught 24/7 in almost any country. There are radio stations, tv stations, podcasts, blogs, websites, YouTube, and streaming where God's word is being faithfully taught constantly. However, these pearls of truth are often hidden among thousands upon thousands of other pearls of almost truth and these pearls of almost truth have absolutely no value in the kingdom of heaven.

The call to faith is there, but those who hear, do not really hear and those who see do not see clearly.

This is why so many people pass by Christianity, for many it has become so commonplace that it does not have a real sense of value. And even when they decide to try it out, why go with that precious one that requires commitment and sacrifice when they can choose an easier one that looks almost as good.

These parables speak to the truth that the Gospel is right there for everyone, hidden under some common dirt, or jumbled among some common valuables, yet few see it for its real worth.

Which brings us to the main point made in the parables. Those who understand the value of the treasure or find that pearl and understand its value, realize that nothing in this world can compare to the value of salvation.

The majority of people in this world are focused purely on worldly things. Their only concerns are in having enough money to pay their bills and go on a vacation. On having a house, maybe a small yard and a garden, but they have no real need or desire for a mansion. On having a few kids who stay out of any form of major trouble, find a wonderful spouse, get a good job and give them a few grandchildren.

This is the sole focus of their life, day in and day out, they work at these worldly goals in hopes of attaining each of them. They work with these worldly accomplishments in mind and never really look for anything more or anything bigger. They walk through the fields of their life, never knowing that just under their feet, covered in a few centimeters of soil lies the greatest treasure they would ever know. They walk through the market, seeing all of the pearls and do not even notice the one that shines brightly among the rest, because they are content with what they have and the goals that they have laid out for themselves.

This is why we see so many people choose a form of Christianity that requires nothing of them. They only come to the market and seek out faith when something in the plan goes wrong. When they have a problem, or go through some form of suffering, that is when they seek God.

These are the people who come to God when they have an illness or ill family member, when they have a challenge, they need to overcome, when they are seeking a new job or promotion, or when they are having trouble in a relationship. They need a quick and easy solution, so they pop out a quick prayer to the pearl of their choice and await their reward. To many of them God is a genie in a bottle, and when he does not grant their wish, they become frustrated and doubt in him.

The major problem that many of those who follow these false pearls, false religions and false Christianity is that they see themselves as sufferers and not sinners. They do not recognize their need is not for a solution to the problem they face but salvation from the sin in their lives.

God calls through His Word for all of his followers to recognize that they are sinners and to repent and obey his Word and it is only after we do this that we begin to recognize the value of that pearl or the greatness of the treasure that is presented to us in His Word.

John Calvin once said, ‘the excellence of the heavenly life is not perceived, indeed, by the sense of the flesh; and so, we do not esteem it according to its real worth, unless we are prepared to deny, on account of it, all that glitters in our eye.’ Simply put, we cannot recognize the value of our salvation until we pick up our cross and die to self.

It is that premise, which is taught in these parables, these men were willing to give up all they had to attain that treasure which they had found. How are we meant to understand this in our modern context?

First, we need to understand that Christianity requires us to change to the very core of our being, not just on the surface of our lives. To be a Christian means to be reborn, to live in a new reality, to become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. There is no middle ground, no dual citizenship. You cannot have one foot firmly established in the worldly kingdom and another in pursuit of the kingdom of heaven.

These are parables of the kingdom of Heaven, which has a king, and we all need to acknowledge that we are most definitely not that king. Each of these parables we have looked at over the past few weeks teach about the sovereignty of God in his kingdom. And to be in His kingdom we need to acknowledge Him as our king. Because in our lives either God is master, or man is master, you cannot serve both masters equally.

Matthew 6:24-25

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

This is where the Word of God becomes that sword that cuts deep. Many people like to feel that they are intellectual, enlightened, balanced and have everything under their control. They say that they accept the teachings in the Bible, but they also want to believe in the spiritual teachings of other faiths or philosophies. When you begin to push them on specific things in the Bible and their adherence to them, that is when they break and admits that they either do not practice that teaching, or blatantly ignore or disagree with the Scripture.

Perhaps the clearest example of this form of Christianity appears in what is known as the Jefferson Bible. U.S. president Thomas Jefferson created a version of the Bible for himself in which he removed any of the passages that he felt were filled with ‘vulgar ignorance, of impossible things, or superstitions, fanaticisms, and fabrications. Anything that dealt with an angel, wise men or the resurrection was left out of Jefferson’s Bible. This resulted in a 2-volume series, ‘The philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth’ and ‘The life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth’ which were 86 pages long in total.

Upon completion of his work, Jefferson was so proud of his accomplishments that he wrote to a close friend and claimed that his Bible was proof that he was a real Christian, a disciple of the doctrine of Jesus.

So many people in the modern world are walking the same path as Jefferson, they might not be editing out the verses that they do not like, instead they are either ignoring them, or worse re-writing them into the things that they wish for them to say, so that they can be the kind of Christians that they want to be.

Ask yourself, who is the king in this situation? Is it God who reveals his truths to man in His Scripture or is it man who changes the Scripture to read what he wants it to read? The truth is that if there is not something in the Scripture that chafes you, that irritates you or challenges you, then you are probably not reading the Bible.

This is why true Christian faith requires a change in our core essence not just a surface level change. Citizenship in heaven is not obtained by just changing a few things in your life and claiming to be a better person. It is about dying to self and following Christ. It is not choosing a few things we like in the Bible and obeying them, it is discovering the truth of the Bible that opens your eyes to the lies of the world. It's not about trying hard to follow the king, it is about recognizing the king is the only one who can save you and swearing your life to him.

The second lesson we learn from these parables is that sacrifice is required of Christians.

Each of these parables have a man, one who is poor and another who is well off. One who stumbles upon a great treasure and another who finds a great treasure when searching amount other valuables. Yet in both parables the man sells everything that they have of value to obtain the one thing that they have found. Each makes a sacrifice of all they value to obtain the one thing of ultimate value.

This does not mean that we need to do like many monks or hermits do. We do not need to sell off everything we own and live a life of poverty. Heaven is not purchased by the giving up of material wealth. Instead, it costs much more, it costs the giving up of the things which draw us away from God, it costs us our sin as we live in obedience to the scripture.

We do not earn a place in God's kingdom by selling all we own, or even by boldly proclaiming the giving up of our sin. We receive our place in God's kingdom when we realize the value of what it is that God is offering. When we understand salvation and eternal life and that the sacrifices, we make here in our lives on earth pale in comparison to the greatness and joy that we will be recipients of in heaven.

Again, this is why so many people are satisfied with those lessor pearls. To them Jesus is not of infinite worth, so they hold tightly onto the things that they value here and the

pleasures that they have on earth, not willing to give them up for anything. True Christian faith realizes that the only thing of lasting value in this world is our faith and all other things the world considers valuable are just trinkets.

Finally, in both parables neither of the men who sold everything they owned felt that they had lost anything. Both knew that what they had found was of infinitely more value than all of the things they had given up in obtaining that one treasure. This is why we cannot buy our way into the kingdom of heaven, the reward we receive in heaven is far more valuable than anything we could sacrifice here on earth.

These parables just serve to remind us of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-25

Matthew 16:24-25

²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Many people either cannot see or refuse to see themselves as sinners in need of God. They walk by the field every day with no desire to ever set foot upon the land and discover what lies underneath. They are happy to have a simple pearl that satisfies their own worldly desires rather than seeking out the one that will bring them salvation.

Being a Christian is not simply saying a prayer or attending a church. This is what the parables are teaching us, a true Christian treasures Christ above all else, is willing to pick up their cross and to sacrifice themselves and all they have to obtain the reward of salvation he promises to his people.

To be a follower of Christ requires Christians to be willing to be at work in themselves, like we spoke about just a few weeks ago, tending the fields and watering the crops of their souls so that the Word of God can find good root and grow and multiply in their lives.

It is when you do this, when you begin to examine yourself in comparison to the truth of God's Word that you discover you are indeed a sinner. And as a sinner we do not just need God's help to get through times of suffering, we need his salvation to get us to a new way of life. We need God because we need a new way of thinking, feeling, and living, we need to be reborn.

It is when we learn to treasure God first, that we are re-created, renewed, and restored into a new life in which we will serve him as the Salt and Light of this world.

Let us pray,

Prayer for the Lord's Day

Almighty Father,
 dwell among us today
 and fill us with yourself.
 Say to each one of us,
 "I am your salvation."
 Speak to us so that we cannot fail to hear.
 Show yourself to us,
 and show us how badly we need you.
 Uphold your servants
 who proclaim your Word in your temple
 and lead the worship of your people.
 Touch the hearts of the hearers
 that they may receive and serve you.
 Hear us, O heavenly Father,
 for the sake of your only Son.
Amen.

Source: attributed to Augustine of Hippo, d. 430

Hymn: "More Precious than Silver"

Lord, You are more precious than silver.
 Lord, You are more costly than gold.
 Lord, You are more beautiful than diamonds, and nothing I desire compares with You.

Invitation to Offering**Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #410: “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You”

Joyful, joyful, we adore You,
 God of glory, Lord of love;
 Hearts unfold like flow'rs before You,
 Op'ning to the sun above.
 Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
 Drive the dark of doubt away;
 Giver of immortal gladness,
 Fill us with the light of day!

All Your works with joy surround You,
 Earth and heav'n reflect Your rays,
 Stars and angels sing around You,
 Center of unbroken praise;
 Field and forest, vale and mountain,
 Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,
 Chanting bird and flowing fountain
 Praising You eternally!

Always giving and forgiving,
 Ever blessing, ever blest,
 Well-spring of the joy of living,
 Ocean-depth of happy rest!
 Loving Father, Christ our Brother,
 Let Your light upon us shine;
 Teach us how to love each other,
 Lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the mighty chorus,
 Which the morning stars began;
 God's own love is reigning o'er us,
 Joining people hand in hand.
 Ever singing, march we onward,
 Victors in the midst of strife;
 Joyful music leads us sunward
 In the triumph song of life.

Pastoral Prayer

O Lord, we praise you with all our soul.
 We praise you for the abundance of grace and mercy
 that we unconsciously receive from you in so many different ways.
 You overlook our iniquities.
 You bring us back to good health.

You save us from evil and inundate us with your love and compassion.
Lord, you provide nourishment and rejuvenation
to our bodies, minds, and souls.
We also know, Lord, that through you,
there will be justice for the suffering of your people.
Thank you for graciously revealing yourself
to your children so long ago,
that we might have the privilege of knowing your will.
We are only deserving of eternal death as a result of our evil ways.
However, rather than eternally condemning your children in anger,
you bestow your unconditional and boundless love on us.
Through your incomprehensible love for us,
you free us completely from the price of our transgressions.
We cherish your compassion
just as a child cherishes the compassion of loving parents.
We know that, without your compassion,
we would be reduced to nothing but dust on this material planet,
alive and growing one day,
then dead and blown away with the wind the next,
fading away even from human memories forever.
Because of your compassion, Lord, we are allowed a life of eternity;
a gift that you have promised even to future God-fearing generations.
Help us and all future generations to hold tightly
to your precious covenant through obedience to your will.
Lord, from your mighty throne you rule over us all.
We call the cherubim that surround you, the seraphim that serve you,
and every believer in your domain to join our souls
in praising your holy name! **Amen.**

Benediction

May our Lord Jesus Christ,
the one who came with grace and truth,
also fill your hearts with grace and truth,
as you serve him in the days ahead.
And may the joy of the Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—
be your strength. **Amen.**