



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092

(262)241-3121 www.stjohnsmequon.org

Email: office@stjohnsmequon.org

Pastor James Tiefel

(262) 853-9723 (cell#)

Email: pastortiefel@gmail.com

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 30, 2023

Define Christian: The Christian Seeks Spiritual Wealth

If we made a list of priorities we have in life, what would be at the top of the list? A more intriguing question might be "Which of the items on my list would I be will to sacrifice to save my top priority?" Jesus' words in the Gospel for this week call for a faith assessment of what really matters in life: Life with God is worth everything. Jesus **DEFINES CHRISTIAN** as a believer who seeks spiritual wealth.

Sermon

Matthew 13:44-52

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.

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.

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Introduction: A man from the Public Health Department came over to Trinity last week to test our water. The church and parsonage are served by well and someone from his office checks the water once a year. Everything was good. But what if it wasn't? What would Trinity do if their well was contaminated? What would they do if the well couldn't be decontaminated? How much would they be willing to spend to get safe water over at Trinity?

Not a problem for us since we have city water at St. John's, but it's a huge problem in a lot of places. Water gets polluted. Industries pollute water, some fertilizers do, hurricanes do, so do droughts and old water pipes. Polluted water smells bad and tastes worse. You don't want to boil your corn in polluted water and you certainly don't want to take a shower in it. Polluted water isn't safe to drink. Polluted water kills people. So what would we do if our water was polluted? People in Butler had to boil their water last week; South Milwaukee had a boil water emergency in June. So what do we do to get safe water? Buy it in bottles? Stop fertilizing fields? Close down industries? Install new water systems? It all costs money. How much would we be willing to spend to get safe water?

Jesus was a master teacher and he often taught the truths about God by telling stories. We call them parables. The four Gospels contain 39 of Jesus' parables. Jesus certainly repeated those stories in a lot of different places, but on one day in Galilee he told eight of them all in a row, one right after the other. All eight described an activity of the Word, how the Word of God works on people and in people. The sower and the seed teaches us how God creates faith in us with the power of the Word. The wheat and the weeds warns us that the devil wants to destroy the faith God plants. The growing seed explains that God is the only one who can make the Word work in our hearts. The story of the mustard seed teaches how the Word spreads all over the world and the story of the yeast explains that the Word grows faith in our hearts. Jesus told three more parables on that day in Galilee and those three are the Gospel for this Sunday: the parable of the hidden treasure, the parable of the pearl, and the parable of the fishing net. All three of them speak about the value of the Word and all three lead us to ask: **How much is the Word of God worth to us? How much are we willing to spend to have the Word?**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. Seems strange maybe but not unusual back then. Wealthy Jewish folks tended to take a portion of their wealth and hide it someplace just in case. That's what this man found. He was out for a walk in a farmer's field, just enjoying the sun. All at once he tripped on something, maybe a root or a stone, but when he looked it was a box, an old, beat-up wooden box. He bent down and opened the cover—the lock had rusted away a long time ago—and what he saw he couldn't believe. Now what to do. He wasn't going to just take it, although the box was way too old to belong to the young farmer who owned the field. So he put it back, went into town, and checked out the legal issues to make sure the treasure could be his.

Maybe that describes our situation. Most of us here this morning didn't go searching for the Word. The treasure was right there when we were born, buried carefully in the hearts of our family and our church. Inside the treasure box was Holy Baptism which our parents made sure we received. There were little prayers and Bible stories and Sunday School lessons. There were sermons and hymns and Bible classes and they were as close as church on Sunday. We knew we had something special and we were determined to take care of it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. Pearls aren't that special in our world, but they were back then. I read someplace that one pearl financed an entire military expedition in the Roman empire. The people Jesus was teaching understood this story. He told them about a man who was a purveyor of pearls, those creamy white oval stones you find inside oyster shells. The guy knew pearls backwards and forwards; he knew the difference between fake and genuine and even between low quality and high quality. So one day, he found a pearl like he had never seen before. It had exceptional luster, brilliant color, and perfect shape.

Most of us are probably not so much like this man but maybe some of us have experienced this. The story meant to say that this was a man who had been searching and searching for most of his life, not for pretty pearls, but for peace with God. He had checked out all the possibilities. A good paying job, an expensive home, and a high-priced sports car brought him pleasure, but not peace. A master's degree and then a doctor's degree pumped up his pride but didn't offer peace. He lived a good life, showed love to his family and was generous to his friends—a good all-around citizen. It gained him popularity, but not peace with God. And then one day he read an article on the internet and the article led him to church and a pastor told him about the saving love of Jesus. He walked out of church at peace with God, with a smile on his face and a tear in his eye. He never felt richer in his life.

Two very different scenarios. Some people find the treasure of the Word without even looking for it. Other people saved it and preserved it first for themselves and then for others. Some people find the treasure of the Word after years of searching and failing to finding anything that would last. But they have one thing in common. The first man? **In his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.** The second man? **When he found a pearl of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.** Which, of course, leads

us to the point Jesus meant to ask us: How much is the Word of God worth to us? How much are we willing to spend to have the Word?

The Bible is more than a book of fascinating stories inside beautiful covers. In all of these parables Jesus was talking to us about the truths we find in the Word of God. The most wonderful truth in the Bible is that God forgives all our sins because of what Jesus did for us. The Bible's good news is the gospel: Your sins are forgiven. But the Word also includes the law, God's commands, and God's threats to punish everyone who doesn't obey them. The law is ugly and harsh, but it's incredibly valuable because it forces us to see how much we really need Jesus. And there's more than information here. There's power here, too. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to convince us that God's commands are real and that he means them. And then the Spirit uses the same Word to lead us to believe that God's impossible promises are really true. The Word helps us understand how God wants us to live and then empowers us to live that way. In ways we don't always understand, the Word makes us confident to pray, it overcomes doubt, it soothes sadness, it provides hope for the future.

What we find in the Word of God is his plan for all of life. It takes us from the beginning of life and the end of life. It answers the questions Where did I come from? Why am I here? and Where am I going? And that's why Jesus told the third parable. **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.** Life is not just for now. Even after they lower our caskets into graves, life goes on: life with God or life without God. That's why the Word of God is not only a treasure for now; it's also a treasure for then. Buried treasures get spent; precious pearls dissolve. The treasure that is God's Word promises us the treasure of eternity.

Story hour was done. Jesus sat with his disciples and asked them the critical question: Have you understood all these things? They said they did, but they really hadn't; time would tell. And then he said, **Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.** In our lives as Christians, old truths need to be retold, but new truths need to be set down. Jesus was born, Jesus died, Jesus rose, Jesus loves—all old truths which never lose their value. But there are more truths that need to be told. How much is the Word of God worth to us? How much are we willing to spend to have the Word and keep it? Those are questions we all have to ask ourselves. How much of our pride are we willing to give up to have the Word? How many of our pleasures, how many of our plans, how much of our profit? Pray God that he leads you to ponder those questions every day because **The Word Is Worth It.** Amen.