



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 11, 2008

The Festival of Pentecost

Matthew 13:44-52

Future Pastor, Jason Strong

First Lesson: Joel 2:28-29

Psalm of the Day: Psalms 51b

Second Lesson: Acts 2:1-21

Gospel: John 16:5-11

Disciples Share the Kingdom

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

TEXT: Matthew 13:44-52 (the Gospel appointed for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost)

“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 fiery 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 been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

Dear fellow messengers of the kingdom,

A young child bursts through the door, a smile beaming from his face. He just received an A on his test, so what is the first thing he does? He proudly shows his test to his mother, who puts it on the fridge for all to see. A husband, who just received that big promotion, doesn't just keep quiet, does he? He takes his family out to dinner to share in his joy and to celebrate the big accomplishment. When a fiancé receives her engagement ring from her future husband, does she hide the ring and keep the good news to herself? No. She gladly and excitedly shows it off to all her friends. When you and I receive something wonderful or of great importance, we share it. You and I want others to experience that same joy and happiness that we have. Today, Jesus speaks of the most precious gift. He urges you and me to share it with all people. This gift brings eternal joy and happiness, so disciples share the kingdom, Jesus teaches.

Disciples share the kingdom:

- 1) With recognition of its value, and
- 2) With concern for the Last Day.

Jesus had a unique way of speaking to both his disciples and the crowds of people. He spoke in parables. Now, a parable was a story in which Jesus would teach the unknown using things that were known. He would tell heavenly things with earthly pictures, like the parable of the sower or planter, or the parable of the lost sheep, or the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the parable of the prodigal son.

Or the parable of the hidden treasure—“The kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said, “is like treasure hidden in a field...” a man walking along the field suddenly stumbled over a piece of earth. Curious as to what had tripped him up, the man began to dig all around him. After several minutes, he hit something hard. Clearing out more dirt, he found himself looking at a small box. Opening it up, a smile formed on his face as he gazed at a chest full of all the gold, silver, and sparkling jewels a person could ever ask for. Overcome with joy, the man hid the chest again, went and sold all he had, and bought that field.”

Finding a hidden treasure like this man did wouldn't have been uncommon in Jesus' time. A rich man would divide his wealth up into three parts, especially in times of war. Because there were no banks to safeguard against thieves stealing money, a person would bury one of those parts. His hope was that he would uncover and retrieve this money if he ever returned to the land. The man in the parable, however, happened upon the treasure accidentally. Recognizing its great value, he gave up all of his possessions willingly and with joy for that treasure. That's what the kingdom of heaven is like!

What is the kingdom of heaven? The kingdom of heaven is when God actively rules to save his people. It's when God made the first gospel promise to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and told them he would crush the serpent. It's when he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that a Savior would come from their family. It's when Jesus lived a pure life for those whose lives were corrupted by sin. It's when Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the entire world and rose three days later. It's when the Holy Spirit spoke through Peter at Pentecost and caused many to be added to the church. That's what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven!

So what then was Jesus saying with this parable? There is a treasure that is more valuable than all other possessions put together. God leads the people to this treasure, the kingdom of heaven, the knowledge of his Son. Those who realize the treasure's great worth will give up everything to keep it.

Jesus continued with another parable, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls...He was a treasure hunter who was searching for the most beautiful pearl. He found many fine pearls, but they all paled in comparison when he finally found the pearl he had been looking for. It was the Hope Diamond of pearls. He too sold all that he had and bought this pearl of great value.” Many people can spend their whole lives searching for that one precious jewel, that which brings satisfaction to their lives. They may go through life looking for better social conditions, moral living, even dabbling in different religions, but they don't find true happiness until they find the kingdom. But like the merchant, some do find that one precious pearl. They find Jesus,

or he finds them. They find his kingdom, or his kingdom comes to them. They learn how he rules to save his people. With recognition of its value, they give up everything so that they might possess the kingdom.

Do we always recognize its worth? Does the kingdom have the top spot in our hearts, in our lives? Or do you and I value other things above it? Does taking the new fishing boat out or watching football take precedence on Sunday morning? Maybe sleeping in, going to the grocery store, taking the kids to soccer games, or going out to eat top the list of things to do instead of going to church. Do you and I make these things worth more than the kingdom of heaven? What about sharing the kingdom? Do you and I willingly share the message of the kingdom with others? Or do we hide it? You and I hide the kingdom when we keep such a valuable treasure to ourselves. You and I hide it when we live lives of sin. You and I hide it in our failure to confront the sinfulness of others. It's so valuable, but it's also so easy to overlook, to ignore, even to hide – much to my shame and yours.

Though you and I have failed, God has not. He did not take the treasure away from us because of our sin. He kept his promises, sending you and me his most valuable treasure. God gave up his greatest treasure, Christ Jesus, so that you and I might possess his kingdom of heaven. While we were caught in our sins, Christ “purchased and won you and me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.” The work of Jesus makes this treasure a gift to us, free of charge. God brings this valuable treasure to you and me. He makes it easily accessible in his Word. With repentant hearts you and I receive this gift in faith. We do possess the most precious treasure.

Because you and I recognize the great value of this treasure, we cannot keep it to ourselves. No, we share the kingdom when we talk about how “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” We share the kingdom when we teach, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We share the kingdom when we proclaim with Peter, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” You and I joyfully share the message of the kingdom with others so that they too might have the treasure of the kingdom of heaven.

As disciples of Christ, you and I share the kingdom because we recognize how valuable it truly is. We want all people to become possessors and heirs of the eternal life that Jesus has won. But you and I also share the kingdom with concern for the Last Day. We know that Jesus will return again to judge all people. Jesus knew this too. “The kingdom of heaven,” he said, “is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When the nets were full of fish, the men dragged it onto the shore. Not wanting to keep the worthless fish that they wouldn't be able to sell, the men separated the good fish from the bad. They kept the good fish, but the fishermen threw the bad fish away.” Jesus explained, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. Angels will separate the wicked from the midst of the righteous. The righteous the Son of Man will take to himself in heaven. The angels will throw the wicked into the fires of hell.” Jesus,

with concern for the Last Day, was warning the people. There will be a separation between believers and outright unbelievers. There will also be another kind of separation as God will judge between his true believers and the “so-called” believers. God will separate the hypocrites from the believers.

You remember Ananias and Sapphira, don't you? A husband and wife, you might have read about them in the Book of Acts. This couple, on the outside, appeared to be godly. They sold some of their property and gave the profits to the church. Or, at least that's what it appeared that they did. But, Ananias and Sapphira, even though they claimed to be giving all of the money from the land, knowingly kept some of it for themselves. They thought that they had fooled everyone, but God knew. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, caught them in their sin. “You have not lied to men, but to God.” God punished Ananias and Sapphira by taking their lives instantly. God knew Ananias' and Sapphira's lies then, and he knows the lies of hypocrites today. He may allow such hypocrites long lives and give them many blessings. But, at the Last Day, he will punish all those who do not believe in him.

So tell me: Why is it that you and I aren't more concerned? Is it that you and I rationalize that since we can't know who is a hypocrite, we can't go around accusing people of being unbelievers? Is it that we buy into the notion, “They already have the message of the kingdom, so there's really nothing I can say or do that will make them change.” Is it that you and I are content to just remain passive instead of actively warning others of what will happen on the Last Day? King David wrote, “Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.” Are we listening? St. Paul wrote, “This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.” Are we listening? Jesus said, “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” Are we listening? When you and I do not share this warning out of concern for the Last Day, we aren't really listening, are we?

But God be praised! He has forgiven your sins and mine, even our failure to show concern for the lost and for that Last Day. God showed concern for us when he sent his Son to die for our sins. He has washed us clean through the waters of baptism, and now you and I live in his grace. He feeds our faith as you and I partake of the Lord's Supper. From Holy Scripture he says, “You are not guilty.” And he gives us plenty of opportunities to show our concern for the Last Day by sharing the kingdom. You're sharing the kingdom when you read bible stories for a family devotion. You're sharing the kingdom when you pray together before a meal, even when you are out to eat. You're sharing the kingdom when you teach the Sunday school kids about their Lord and Savior. You're sharing the kingdom when you invite your neighbor to the church picnic. You're sharing the kingdom when you volunteer your time to go door to door to hand out brochures for the church. You're sharing the kingdom when you show concern for the Last Day.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who finds hidden treasure, like another who finds a precious pearl. The kingdom of heaven is like a fisherman who separates the good fish from the bad. Jesus has a memorable way of encouraging us, doesn't he? He speaks one final encouragement to us in this parable; "Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." You and I have the treasure of the kingdom. We have old treasures, truths from the Bible that you and I have known from early on. You and I possess new treasures, which are the new truths that we learn from a continuing study of God's Word. You and I possess these precious treasures with joy, and God wants all people to share in them. So, recognizing the value of this treasure, and with concern for the Last Day, disciples share the kingdom. I do it, and so do you!

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.