



Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon for the Eight Sunday of Pentecost 2017

*Do you understand these things?*



St. John's Lutheran Parish  
Shelly Beach

### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 13,44-52

- **ESV** <sup>44</sup> "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.
- <sup>45</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,
- <sup>46</sup> who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.
- <sup>47</sup> "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.
- <sup>48</sup> When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.
- <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous
- <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- <sup>51</sup> "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes."
- <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that the Word of God may reveal to us who we are as the kingdom of God. Amen.*

### • **Dear Beloved of God!**

• At this stage Jesus only spoke to His disciples. It was getting tougher and tougher for them. The resistance against Jesus was rising. Similar to us in our times! Jesus was openly exposing the Jewish leaders and even against His own family He made some critical remarks. That didn't help to calm down the situation. If this would have happened in our days Jesus would have been considered as being unloving and issuing hate speech. It is in this context, that Jesus spoke these three parables assigned for today to His disciples. He wanted to encourage them that although things will get mighty tough, this is what the kingdom of Heaven is like, for now. On the Last Day things will come right. Then the final separation of good and evil will be finalised by the angels.

- But for now the kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up again. Then he goes and joyfully gives all He has to buy this field with the treasure.
- The kingdom of Heaven is also like a merchant who searches for fine pearls. When he finds the finest pearl he also went and sold everything he had to buy this pearl.
- "*Do you understand them?*" Jesus asked the disciples and they answered straight away, "yes"- maybe a bit too quick. Then Jesus concluded this section of parables with, "*Therefore every scribe who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a man, a landowner, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.*" The disciples of the kingdom of heaven. They are the ones who bring forth old and new - whatever that means- out of their treasure.
- The kingdom of heaven is indeed the greatest treasure, because whoever is part of the kingdom of heaven will live forever!
- So, are you like that man, am I like that man? Are you prepared to sacrifice everything from this world, even your own life, your own self, to have that treasure? If we think we might answer "yes", lets just do a reality check: how does it go with our commitment towards serving the kingdom of heaven, that is more concretely, serving God and our neighbour? If the kingdom of heaven is our highest treasure then equally hearing, singing, praying and confessing the Word of God will be our utmost priority in life. Is this the case in our lives? Are we willing to give up all we have with joy like that man to be baptised to receive forgiveness of sins?
- The other parable is quite similar, also comparing the kingdom of heaven with a very valuable thing, this time a precious pearl. Now a pearl is not only precious but it is also beautiful. It shines! This time the person searched for it. He looked for it. When he found it, again, like in the previous parable, he sold everything he had and *redeemed* this one pearl! Here we find the same absolutely drastic behaviour of the person.
- The reason why these people gave up everything was because they found something so special which was worth losing everything just to gain the treasure or the pearl. So, once again, we need to ask ourselves, is the kingdom of heaven so valuable to us? All or nothing. You cannot get it unless all of what you have, all of what I have, has been sacrificed. Are we not clinging, just a little bit, to our things, our work, our purpose, to our selves in life? All of this to *redeem* the treasure, the pearl, that is the kingdom of heaven?

- But then ... since when would all we have be good enough in any case? Would giving my life to Jesus be enough to buy a place in the kingdom of God?
- And then, didn't Jesus in the other parables make it abundantly clear that He is the sower, the one doing our salvation for us? He did say in the heading of the sermon on the mount, blessed are the poor in the spirit- not the rich in the spirit. He made it clear that the "little ones", those who are in the receiving mode, like little infants, those who know that they have nothing to offer, to give- they receive the kingdom. How can those ever buy such a treasure, such a precious pearl?
- Furthermore, let us remember the ending of the parables, "*every scribe who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven*". The disciple did not make himself a disciple. Someone else made him into a disciple! This reminds us of Mt 28,19: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*" The grand finale of the Gospel which overwhelmingly states that no ways can we buy the kingdom of heaven!
- So, we have to return to the parables. What is going on there? Who is this recklessly radical man and ... what is the treasure?
- The last word of Jesus (last verse of our passage) concluding the parables leads the way [52]: "*And He said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been made a disciple by/in the kingdom of heaven is like a man, a landowner, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'*" Now we see that Jesus sees the treasure as the **heart of the disciple**. That means you are the treasure! That means you are the pearl!
- That is: Jesus is the man who sacrifices everything to redeem the treasure who is in the ground. Jesus redeems you, the dead in sin, under the Law, poor in the Spirit, old Adam. He redeems you and has you. You belong to Him now. You are His and so, listen to this- you are the kingdom of heaven, you, who have been redeemed, bought free from death, who believe and trust in Jesus for your salvation. You are His treasure, His pearl.
- The OT reading confirms this: "*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*" Israel is God's treasured possession. And Jesus is the head of Israel. He is the head of His church, the head of His Body. He is Israel. You, who have been baptised and taught and therefore believe,

your heart of faith is a treasure, is a pearl in the eyes of God!

- Jesus is the kingdom of heaven first and foremost. He is the first one to be resurrected and to ascended to the right hand of God. But in Baptism His name was assigned to us, and the name of the Father and the name of the Holy Spirit. We are in Christ. He is in us. We are united with Him. And so you are His holy people, and therefore His treasured possession!
- This is the Gospel. This is the good news. And now, as God values us as such, we have to consider ourselves as alive in Christ! As He values His whole church as precious as a pearl, how can we not be joyful to participate in His Kingdom! How can we carry on worrying about our future? How can we go and sit in a corner and think "nobody loves me"? It is simply not true. As you hear Christ speaking to you today you cannot say this any more. The Son of God has sacrificed all He had to redeem you, to find you, to bury you again and to redeem you. He found you, leads you to repentance, and redeems you.
- This is what happens in His Divine Service. The kingdom of heaven comes to us. Yes, we have seen, in the previous parables, that the church looks weedy, it doesn't look impressive. Redeemed sinners you will find here. It starts small but in the end it has grown past all other trees. God works through His *people*. They, you are sown in the world. The promise of God given to Abraham is being fulfilled through Christ in the Body of Christ. He is making Himself a holy nation, His treasured possession, His precious beautiful pearl. And the best news for you, you are part of it.
- Therefore, become who you are. We see that after Jesus' death and resurrection His disciples became willing to become martyr's. They also gave up everything, not to gain the kingdom, but for the sake of sharing the wonderful news with others who were still dead in sin, being witnesses of the truth. And so we become willing to sacrifice our life, our time, our money and resources so that those still dead in sin may hear the voice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who will lead them to repentance, to bury their old self, and to redeem them from death to life and lead them to have communion with the tree of Life.
- The seed grows, the kingdom of heaven is expanded, and our joy is fulfilled. Praise and thanks to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
- *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor 13, 14).*