

“Getting a Good Deal”

Matthew 13:44-52

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 13, 2013

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to find a hidden treasure? Perhaps you could become rich beyond your wildest dreams. Actually, your odds of finding treasure are better here than many places. In the course of history there have been a number of shipwrecks along the coast and in the bays and rivers of south Texas and so from time to time people will discover gold coins or other valuables that get uncovered by the waves or by storms. Out on the island there's a spot where gold coins were found so often it was named Money Hill. There are numerous stories of people who buried small fortunes in our area and then died or never returned to collect them, and indeed people still find some of these treasures.

Many times, however, people who find treasure are not really looking for it. Take for example Rob Cutshaw, who hunts for rocks and sells them in his little roadside shop in rural North Carolina, close to the Georgia-Tennessee border. In 1969 he found a rock that he described as “purdy and big.” At the time he tried to sell the large blue stone but no one was interested. He said he thought he might be able to get as much as \$500 for it but would have taken less. So he says he put the rock in a box under his bed where it sat for the next 18 years when he pulled it back out and put it on display in his shop. At that point he says he would have taken a hundred dollars for it.

It turns out that his big blue rock was actually a sapphire. Not just any sapphire, though. When he learned that it was a sapphire he contacted a gem cutter to have it cut and polished. What he ended up with was the world's largest sapphire gemstone, weighing 2,111 carats and valued around \$2.75 million.

Or perhaps you'll find your life-changing treasure at a garage sale like a family in New York. In 2007 they purchased a five inch white ceramic bowl at a garage sale for \$3 and put it on display in their living room. Recently they decided to find out what it might be worth and had it examined by ceramics experts. It turns out that it is about a thousand years old and comes from the Northern Chinese Song Dynasty. Sotheby's estimated that it would sell for two to three hundred thousand dollars. Not a bad return on a \$3 investment. Well that's not the end of the story. This past March a London dealer, Giuseppe Eskenazi, paid more than \$2 million for the little bowl. It turns out there's only one other known bowl of the same size and decoration, and it's been sitting in London's famed British Museum for more than 60 years.

Jesus said, “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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” These two short parables share a common theme – the extreme value of the kingdom of heaven.

In the first parable, the image Jesus uses is of a man who is working in a field. He's a hired laborer. While working he comes across a buried treasure. In those days there were no banks and so the way people often kept things safe was to bury them. As the South was invaded during the Civil War many people buried their valuables to protect them from the occupying army. In ancient Israel there were specific rules about buried treasure that said that if a person found treasure they were entitled to keep it but if that person found it while employed by

someone else he had to purchase the land in order to keep the treasure. That's what Jesus says the man did. He went and sold everything he had in order to buy that little plot of ground.

The second parable is about a man who makes his living buying and selling pearls. In those days pearls were extremely valuable, comparable to diamonds today. In Revelation 21 the gates of the New Jerusalem are described as being made of one large pearl, hence the name "the pearly gates." One of the reasons they were so valuable was that they were very difficult to find. The pearl oysters lived in deep water, about 40 feet deep, and the only way to retrieve them was to hold your breath and dive, with the help of a rope and a large rock. And then, only one out of every thousand oysters contained a pearl of any value.

In both of these parables, the men find something of great value, something that they are willing to sell everything they have in order to possess. One of them stumbles upon it by accident. He's not looking for treasure but when he finds it he knows he must act. Some people aren't looking for new life in Christ. But one day they hear the gospel and it clicks, it makes sense and it changes their life. The other one has spent his life searching for that valuable pearl. Some people spend their lives searching for the truth.

The kingdom of heaven is that treasure and that pearl. Jesus is the ultimate truth. His kingdom is of supreme value, worth giving up everything you have. That leads us to ask the question: What do you value most in this world? What is your most prized possession? Is it your house? Your car? Your career? Your family? Whatever it is that you value, the kingdom of heaven—which is anywhere that God's will is done, where Jesus is Lord—is more valuable.

But many people don't see it that way. For many people today Jesus' kingdom is just as

hidden as buried treasure. They go about life with no idea about what life with Jesus is like. What they know about the Christian faith may come from bad personal experiences or simply from what they see on television. That's where we come in. One of the Great Ends of the Church adopted by the Presbyterian church years ago, is the exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world. In other words, our job as Christ-followers, as the church, is to show other people what the kingdom of heaven is like. We are to show them how much better it is than the kingdom of this world.

That brings us to Jesus' third parable in this passage, the parable of the dragnet. He says that one day every one of us will have to stand before God and give an account of our life. The question will basically be, "which kingdom did you join?" At that time those in Christ's kingdom will be separated from those who rejected his kingdom and for those who rejected him the result will be dreadful.

So here's the moment of truth. In which kingdom are you living? You see, some people find that hidden treasure, that pearl of great price, the good news of Jesus, and they say, "it's not for me." They cover it back up and walk away. Or maybe they say, "one day I'll go buy that field or that pearl. But today I want to enjoy the things I already have." They're not willing to give up the things of this world in order to obtain the better thing. Friends, don't fool yourself. Christ's kingdom demands that you put him first and everything else comes second. Jesus said, "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you."

If you really are living in the kingdom of heaven it will show in the way you use your time, the way you spend your money, and the way you interact with people who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus. You find that your time and money are no longer your prize possessions but they become tools to

use in the mission of Jesus, which is what Jesus meant when he said that every person 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. Those who find the treasure of the kingdom share that treasure, pointing others to it as well.

Amen