

“Treasured”

Matthew 13:44

When I was a child, my grandfather gave me my first football. It was a black rubber football with mascots of all the universities in the SEC, including my favorite team the Arkansas Razorbacks. Man, did I treasure that football. I carried that thing with me everywhere. I played with it everyday. I even slept with it sometimes. When it got dirty I cleaned it. It was always perfectly inflated. Even if it wasn't true, I believed that all my friends were jealous of my football. It became even more valuable to me when my grandfather passed away. It was something I could hold onto to remember him. I'll never forget the day that it got kicked over a neighbor's fence and somehow disappeared forever. I was crushed. I treasured that football. We all have treasures in this life. We may not always call them that, but that's what they are. They give us joy. We spend our time and energy caring for them and learning about them. Often we are willing to sacrifice a great deal in order to keep them.

Our text this morning talks about treasure. This parable of Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a story of a hidden treasure in a field, that when a man discovers it, is so excited and overjoyed that he sells all he has so that he can buy the entire field. The way that many people in Jesus time and even many people today understand that the point of comparison Jesus is making is that kingdom of God is the priceless treasure, and when people discovers the joy of God's kingdom, they should want to sell all that they have, drop everything in their lives, and devote themselves to God. They should want to pursue this treasure, giving up everything necessary to find it. After all it makes sense doesn't it? It's God's kingdom. Its truth, its life, its hope for eternity! Why wouldn't we want to give everything up to pursue and follow God with all of our heart and soul, and strength.

But is that really what Jesus is saying to us today? As we take a closer look at this story we see there is a little more to this story about treasure than what some might think. Finding hidden treasure in fields was not an unusual occurrence during Jesus time. Armies were slow moving in those days and if you knew that an army was coming through to destroy and loot your city, you would take whatever valuables you had and bury them. Since disturbed soil would give it away the location, it was smarter to bury your valuables in a field that had already been tilled. After the army moved through, if you were still alive, you knew the exact location you buried it and could easily go and retrieve your treasure. However, as many did not survive there remained buried treasure that would begin to surface over time. The general rule when it came to unearthing a treasure like this was “finder's keepers”. The man in the parable should have just walked away with it freely. It was his, he found it! But the man in the parable, finding one of these treasure stashes, we read joyfully gave up everything that he had and bought the entire field to ensure that it would remain his.

To the people of Jesus day, this would have been ridiculous. Why would anyone sell all he has to purchase something that is already his? What could this treasure be to invoke such a strange response? While the disciples did not fully understand at this time, as many do not understand about our Christian faith today is we are not the man in the parable pursuing the treasure that is the Kingdom of God, Jesus is the man finding and claiming us. We are the treasure! We read in Scripture that Jesus with the joy set before him went to the cross scorning its shame so that he might redeem and purchase me, the treasure. Jesus gave up everything and *joyfully* went to the cross, gave it all, and rose again so that he might purchase us and we might have life everlasting. God did not just leave us there, covered in dirt, lying helplessly in a field. He claimed us!

Many of us have a hard time believing that we are really treasure. It doesn't make sense that the God of the Universe would make such a sacrifice for people like us. When we look at ourselves we often times don't see a treasure of a person. We see years of mistakes piled up on one another. We see loneliness and fear. We see suffering and broken relationships. No matter how hard we try to cover it up and mask our condition, we know we are far from perfect. Like the treasure in the parable we are covered with the dirt and grime of our own sin. No matter how many times we try to keep our hearts and lives upright, we always seem to fail. No matter how much we'd like to give up everything joyfully and forgive and love and love others as Christ did, we end up messy, banged up, and buried.

But that's the beauty of this parable. The parable speaks nothing of how great the treasure is, but all about the man who in his joy sold everything for the treasure. God treasures us not based on our own beauty or worth, not because we are special or good, but simply because of *who He is*. It was His plan since fall of Adam and Eve to save us from our sin because He treasures His creation. He treasures us just as we are, sin and all. In the passage from Deuteronomy we read early, God calls the Israelites his treasured possession. It was definitely not because of how faithful and great they were. They were not numerous or powerful, they were nobodies, wanderers without a home. Time and time again they rebelled against God and rejected His love for them. But even in their condition God showed them just how much He treasured them by forgiving them. And through the Israelites, He sent His own Son to save the entire world. And in His death and resurrection He showed us just how much He treasures all people, even sinners like you and me.

What a relief to know that even while we remain God's treasure we don't have to prove ourselves. We don't have to have everything in this life figured out in order to matter to God. We are His treasure regardless. We never have to worry about Him reneging on His promise. The apostle Paul in our reading from Roman's today reminds us that God loves us so much that nothing, not even the most stressful things in this life

separate us from His love. We're His treasure! God treasures you and I even more than we treasure even the most valuable things in our lives, yes even my football. And He shows it to us in the gifts that He gives to us. He reminds us in His Word and in the Sacraments. In our Baptism we are washed clean. Just as I treasured my football and would clean it off so it was shiny new, so God washes in Baptism. And through Christ He declares us and sees us perfect, shiny treasure. In a few minutes He will give to us His very body and blood to say, "Look, I love you so much that I give you myself and so that you might know for sure that you're my treasure, for your strength of faith and forgiveness of sins, and that you too may treasure one another."

What a concept! God calls us to treasure one another too. When we realize just how much God treasures us, when we realize that our relationship with Him is secure because of who He is, it changes the way we see other people in our life. Of course it's not easy. It's hard enough to treasure the people that we care about let alone the people that we don't. It's far easier to see the dirt and grime of hurt feelings and negative attitudes. But with Christ's help we have the calling and opportunity to see past that dirt and forgive and love simply because God did that for us.

My wife Kristen and I attended a Christian marriage retreat about a year ago. And if you've ever been to retreats before you know they make you do all sorts of bonding and talking about feelings and sharing and its all uncomfortable really, but there is one thing that we picked up from that retreat that we still keep with us today. The speaker challenged us to, when we woke up each morning to say to our spouse, "You are my treasure". And we thought it was kind of silly at first but after a while of doing this we realized it really does make a difference in the way we treat each other. Instead of starting the day grumpy, thinking of all the things that need to be done, and how the other person should be helping out, we reminded each other that we treasured each other because God had blessed us with each other. And when we remember, we still do it to this day.

It is my prayer this morning that you remember that you are God's treasure. As much as you love and care for the people you treasure most in your life, know that God treasures you even more just as you are. Remember that this church is such a great and safe place, not because there are so many friendly people but because we realize that all people are treasured by God. And then begin to look for opportunities in your life to let others know how much God treasures them as well just as they are. It's a hard task, but it's a joyful one as well. God bless you.

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