

“Something of Value”

Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 26, 2020

N. Farnham & St. John’s Episcopal Churches – The Rev. Torrence Harman

Romans 8:26-39; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

**“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. . . yeast. . . treasure hidden in a field . . . a merchant in search of fine pearls . . . a net that was thrown into the sea.”**

Not one, not two, not even three, but five parables in a row. Like a string of pearls – pearls of wisdom if we take our time with them. What a rich opportunity. Something of value waits for us if we seek it among the words and phrases of this passage from the Gospel of Matthew. Perhaps there is treasure waiting for us, taking a parabolic “pearl” one at a time and then considering what strings them together, remembering and trusting Jesus’ words: “Seek and ye shall find.”

The crowds are once again gathered around Jesus. They pour out from little villages, farms, groves, and shorelines around the Galilee. Are they taking a day off from work but carry their worries with them? Planters of olive or fruit tree groves or vineyards trying to trust the rhythm of sun and rain they can’t control. Homemakers thinking about the bread hopefully rising back home. Farmers anxious about what is growing or not in their field. Merchants whose livelihood depends on finding things of value to offer to those searching for things of value to buy. Fishermen wondering about their next catch and will it be good. Things their lives and the lives of their families depend on.

Those in the crowd listening on Jesus’ every word have come searching for something from this new wonder worker, this teacher who doesn’t use fancy words but images his listeners can understand because those images are about their everyday life in the world around them. What, we wonder, are these first century folks looking for as they take the time out of their week to come away into the countryside where Jesus waits with his Word for whoever shows up. In this Northern Neck countryside of little towns, farms, and shorelines two thousand years later we have come for something too, haven’t we? What are we hoping to find of value this morning as we gather around Jesus and his Word with images of the world around us?

Jesus strings together a series of one or two liner parables, like pearls on a hidden silken thread. At first glance so simple. But a classic strand. Parables use familiar, icon like images, but hidden treasure lies within, below the surface of the words. That is, if we follow the implied instructions: Seek and ye shall find! Shall we dig in, examine this string of parabolic pearls of Jesus wisdom? See what we can find?

In each of the parables there is something of value, something that starts out small, something that offers the possibility of “increase.” A tiny mustard seed that may become a great shrub, a tree offering shade and a nesting place. A little yeast in a huge measure of flour, at work to make the whole batch rise into something nourishing, the bread of life. Treasure that hints of more to be found in the same field. A small luminous pearl worth selling everything else to obtain it. A net full of fish and apparent ease at discerning, one at a time, what is good to keep, what to discard. Jesus understands that one of our deepest desires is to find something of value.

In each of the parables there is something hidden. The tree’s potential, its growth DNA embedded in the mustard seed. The rising properties of yeast hidden, unseen but showing up as the bread rises. The treasure is, as stated upfront, hidden in the field. A single pearl, its value hidden, but to be discovered when value can be assessed. Fish hidden within the depths of the sea. Jesus knows those listening to him are seekers, willing to come a distance to find, perhaps from him, something that has otherwise been hidden from their lives. They are searchers because something may be missing from their lives – something they need to discover to find life more abundant.

In each parable there is a hopeful someone, hopeful of abundance. The “someone” who planted a tiny mustard seed, hoping for a someday great tree. The woman mixing yeast into her dough, hopeful of a fragrant nourishing outcome, daily bread for her family. The treasure hunter hoping to find treasure. The finder of a pearl who seeks to obtain something luminous and precious. The fisherman seeking an abundance of what is good.

Imagine how each of these “seekers” ultimately felt. When the planter of the mustard sat in the shade of his great tree. When the homemaker brought out a beautiful warm loaf of bread and sets it before her hungry family. When the

treasure hunter was handed the deed to the field. When the one desiring the lustrous pearl cradles it gently in the palm of his hand. When the fishermen head back to shore with a boat full of good fish.

Joy, delight, peace, a sense of “I can make it through another day, week, month, year sustained by what I have searched for and found.” A sense of luck perhaps, but especially a sense of grace, something special working in their life. A sense of something in each of their lives coming to fruition, completion, a good result, something to make life richer. Thankfulness for the gifts of perseverance and for the hope that sustained them. A sense of things coming together for good for each of them.

Jesus says:

This is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. I hand you images of my Father’s world, of the world in which you live, of nature, the comings and goings of your life. I offer you my understanding of your deepest needs and desires: for a rich, full, abundant life of wholeness and connection to and with good things. Joy, delight, peace, life sustained and continued both in the here and now present moment and an unfolding yet to come, day by day, week by week, year by year. I offer you the understanding that there is something hidden going on in the depths of who you are, like leaven, like something planted deep in the seed of who you are, that waits in your depths – just cast your net into this my Father’s world, seek and find what mysteriously is working within, hidden, but waiting to be found by you to fill you with joy, peace, abundance, satisfaction for your soul and your spirit. Feel my love surrounding you as you seek what you need to live in more, light and peace.

These parables, pearls of great wisdom offered us today by Christ, they are pearls of great value. Here’s how pearls (real or cultured) are formed. They are formed when a tiny incidental particle from the outer world of a mollusk disturbs the life of the creature housed within the shell in which it lives. Layer upon layer of nacre, an inner secretion stimulated by the presence of the particle slowly, silently over time (it can take years) surrounds the core particle. The more the layers the more luminous, numinous becomes the pearl, as if it has an inner light about it.

Christ takes something ordinary and small from the world of his listeners. Lovingly over his life with and among them, he layers the particles of their world with lustrous nacre – love and compassion and understanding. Shows his listeners how lustrous, luminous, of immense value are the particles of their lives in this his Father's world. How love, compassion, understanding can surround what is small, incidental, even unwanted until something becomes beautiful, iridescent, lustrous, light filled, formed into something beautiful, precious, of great value.

The particles of our lives become that out of which something precious can be formed as we are molded, shaped formed, layered by love. How beautiful the image of the moments, the times of our lives, so formed becoming pearls that the Divine then delightedly and lovingly threads on a silken string from the beginning to the end of whatever length of life emerges. That silken string holding it all together, the Kingdom Way of Love, the thread that links our worldly life to heavenly life is Christ's love. What in heaven or on earth can be more valuable than one's life becoming a luminous strand formed in and by love, precious to heaven and of great value in the world to the One who created the world.

Seek and ye shall find what you deeply desire: love, connection, a life luminous with meaning, feeling that you are someone precious, treasured and of great value. Come to Christ. Come as you are and open to the soothing transforming love of Christ. Then live every precious moment of your life forward knowing that heaven is here on earth for you, unfolding moment by moment in your Father's world infused with love.

*May it be so as we open to this Love. . . .*

*Torrence*