

Matthew 13:44-52 – Pentecost 9 – The Kingdom of Heaven – July 30, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

Years ago, when we bought our first house, we buried a jar of pennies in the backyard. Every house needs a little buried treasure after all. When we moved here, we buried that same jar of pennies. And it is still there—a couple of feet underground.

They are not making pennies anymore. Maybe that jar is worth something now. I will be very disappointed if we wake up tomorrow with holes dug all over our yard.

Jesus tells a parable about hidden treasure in a field in our Gospel reading. And then two more parables. One is about a pearl of great value. And the other is about a fishing net. All three are about the kingdom of God. And all three invite our consideration.

We have been looking at Jesus' parables in Matthew for the last two weeks. We have looked at the *Parable of the Sower* and the *Parable of the Weeds*. And thankfully, Jesus interpreted them for us. This doesn't mean that they are without difficulty. Parables are intended to make us think—to push us a little. But His interpretation helps us to read them rightly.

Let's start today with the *Parable of the Net*. And Jesus once again explains Himself. He interprets. This parable is about judgment day. It employs an image from the fishing industry. And it speaks a similar message as the *Parable of the Weeds*.

But if we go all the way back to verse 36, we see that the context changes. Jesus speaks to His disciples with all three of today's parables—rather than the crowd.

Remember that parables are often spoken against the skepticism of the crowd. Jesus will use them against the Pharisees as well. This is to fulfill prophecy. In our context, Matthew cites Psalm 78, "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

But the three parables that we heard today are told within the context of the Disciples. We have even admired the Disciples as they seek understanding. They ask for Jesus' interpretation of the parables. We see the virtue of good theological questions.

And here, Jesus explains the meaning of this third parable from our reading. The intention is to sustain His discouraged and disheartened disciples by pointing them to the close of the age.

All will be made right in the end. Christ will come again. Sin will be no more. All will be made new. The promise of the coming kingdom gives courage to His disciples. His teaching imparts strength to carry out the mission He has given them.

The image of the net gathering a whole host of different kinds of sea creatures evokes the original call of Jesus to be His disciples—to be His followers. In Matthew 4, Jesus speaks to Peter and Andrew, James and John, and He says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

The mission of the church will go on—it must go on. The gates of hell cannot stand against Christ's kingdom—Christ's church. Through Jesus' words and deeds—through the labor of the Disciples that come after Him—all kinds of people will be called to salvation—to discipleship—to new life in Christ.

In the parable, all kinds of sea creatures will be gathered into the visible community of believers—both good and rotten. This is surprising—and slightly different from the *Parable of the Weeds*. There, the field is the world. Here the net is the gospel.

Martin Franzmann's hymn—*Preach You the Word*—we sang this a few weeks ago—and it is based on the *Parable of the Sower*—asks an important question which applies equally to these two parables. He says, "Though some be snatched, and some be scorched, and some be choked and matted flat, the Sower sows; His heart cries out, Oh, what of that, and what of that?"

And the answer? Well, according to the *Parable of the Net*, the angels will sort it out on the great last day of the Lord. God will remedy this mixture of believers and unbelievers. Judgment day will bring such tensions to an end.

But Jesus' Disciples are not to lose heart. They are to be about the Father's business, come what may. They are to carry on as they follow Him—in His outreach to Israel—and finally to all the nations. This is the nature of the kingdom of God.

When Jesus finished talking about these three parables—the *Treasure*, the *Pearl*, the *Net*—and I realize we have only talked about the third one so far—I intend to remedy that—He asks the Disciples if they understand. They said yes, of course. I am not sure they do—not yet anyway. We are only in Matthew 13.

But I like the little aphorism that Jesus leaves for us. He says, "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." So interesting.

To the Disciples, it has been given to know—even if such knowledge is faltering and incomplete at this state—the mysteries of the kingdom of God. What are those mysteries? Well, just the things Jesus has been talking about in the parables.

For example, we find that the Word of God does not always succeed in penetrating human hearts. It is unthinkable, but people resist His Word. Many oppose and neglect His purposes for them.

And as God has chosen to do things, His kingdom looks inefficient and rigorous and out-of-touch. People are all around Jesus—then and now—but we can't always tell who really belongs and who does not.

But in spite of the uncertainties of this present time, the day of reckoning—the last day—will put things right. Jesus will return—this time with power and great glory. And for those who trust in Jesus now—those who follow Jesus in discipleship—there is hope and a future.

There is His promise of security, forgiveness, and eternity. Even though the life of Jesus' Disciples remains hidden—murky and mysterious—we can trust in Christ who will ultimately and fully manifest God's kingdom.

The Disciples who understand these things, then, will have a treasure trove of wisdom. They are ready for the opposition they face.

Remember that Jesus goes to Nazareth in the very next passage. He won't be well-received. The whole thing ends with His friends and neighbors trying to throw Him off a cliff. At least in Luke's Gospel.

Even so, Jesus' Disciples are prepared. We will be able to bring out of our "treasure what is new and what is old." I think this suggests being able to grapple with God's Word—in the Old Testament and now in the New.

Because we have—like Mary—pondered His Word in our hearts—because—like the other Mary—we sat at the feet of Jesus—we can handle David in the Psalms. We can make sense of Isaiah's hope for God's people. We can even read the book of Job productively. And now, we can deal fruitfully with Jesus' parables.

When we have struggled with God's Word—when we continue to struggle—when we make these stories our own—we begin to see things God's way. Armed with insight and understanding—we follow Jesus—and we join with Him in His kingdom which has no end.

Okay, but what about these two other parables? *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* and *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value* are clearly related. And we find them only in Matthew. Although they do sound a lot like the *Parable of the Lost Coin* in Luke's Gospel.

When we describe the features of these two stories, we notice several differences. Only *The Hidden Treasure* has a theme of joy. Only *The Pearl* has the idea of searching.

In *The Hidden Treasure*, the valued object is one of a kind. In the other, the emphasis is on a specific pearl among many others. In *The Hidden Treasure*, the man buys the entire field for the sake of the treasure. In *The Pearl*, only the single valued object is purchased.

What these parables hold in common is this: a person purchases the valued object at the cost of everything else. There is something so valuable that everything else pales in comparison. Each story relates to a person who sells everything to buy the object. So how do we interpret these parables?

Now it is interesting to try to assign meaning. Basically, there are two questions. What is the treasure? And who is the man? It is not so easily resolved. Maybe you have an idea of what these parables mean. But can you think how they might also mean something else? Let me give you two possible interpretations. And then we can lament because Jesus didn't interpret these parables for us too.

The first interpretation is that they teach that the treasure is the kingdom of God. And we are the laborer who stumbles upon it. And if this is what Jesus is saying, the kingdom is worth all that we possess. Despite its small beginnings—and the ways that it is hidden—it is worth all that we have. If it costs you everything—you have not paid too much. Jesus calls His disciples to take up their crosses and follow Him. And this is certainly true.

But there is a problem with this interpretation. And maybe this isn't obvious. But it is worth thinking about. And maybe I am just pushing this parable too far. But if we interpret this parable in this way—if the kingdom is the pearl—and we are the merchant—then things could start to get a little dicey.

Jesus, His Gospel, His kingdom are worth all that we have. And that's not too much to ask. Holy Baptism is death to our sinful nature—even as it is resurrection to new life in Christ. Grace is costly. And remember, these parables were spoken to the Disciples, not the crowd.

But in Christian doctrine—especially our understanding of salvation—we don't *buy* the kingdom. In fact, apart from God's intervention, we don't even go searching for the kingdom.

Someone else does the purchasing—the redeeming—the buying back. The righteousness of God must be a gift. And this is all in Christ. And regardless of our interpretation, we need to keep our understanding of salvation straight.

So the second interpretation suggests that the treasure represents God's chosen people. The laborer in the first parable—and the merchant of the second parable—both represent Christ. He is the One seeking treasures and pearls. He is the One seeking and saving the lost—people that He greatly values.

Now, most days I don't feel much like a treasure. But it is not about my feelings. It is about the identity that God gives. Our Old Testament reading even calls us God's "treasured possession."

From this perspective, the parables suggest that God has chosen us to be His holy people. And it suggests He seeks us out. This all happens by way of the cross—the costliest thing that has ever happened. And this interpretation seems to coincide better with the *Parable of the Net*—assuming they are closely related.

So, which one is it? Are these parables about Disciples—who have been called by Christ to follow Him—even if it costs us everything—discovering the treasure of the kingdom of God? Or are these parables about Christ seeking us out through His sacrificial life—through His work on the cross?

Martin Luther speaks to *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* in his *Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses*. And he leans toward the first answer—but then integrates the second. He says, "The Gospel of God is something which is not very well known to a large part of the church. Christ speaks of the gospel as a treasure which is hidden in a field."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his wonderful book, *Discipleship*, says even more, "Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything they have. It is the costly pearl, for whose price the merchant sells all that he has. It is the call of Jesus Christ which causes a disciple to leave his nets and follow him."

And maybe these kinds of comments shed light on the mystery of these texts. The kingdom of God is more than just His teachings, commands, or corrections—it is also forgiveness, life, and salvation. And when Jesus calls us—He is seeking us out. He is saving us through His kingdom. We seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness—and the glorious Gospel is there for us.

We sing a hymn entitled, *Your Kingdom, O God, Is My Glorious Treasure*. Somehow, I omitted that one today. I am not sure what I was thinking. I will use the first verse as my conclusion. I think the interpretation of these parables should sound a lot like this.

"Your kingdom, O God, is my glorious treasure. My pearl of incomparable worth. Its value exceeds every standard of measure, surpassing the wealth of the earth. Lord, give me Your grace and the power of the Spirit to value this treasure aright, that never allured by the world, I inherit Your kingdom of glory and light." In the name of Jesus. Amen.