

Provoked by the Parables

The Hidden Treasure

February 13, 2011

**Psalm 119:1-8 & Matthew 13:44
(Hymns – 761, 526, 80, 765)**

This another one of those wonderfully provocative similitudes that Jesus fires off at the people gathered to hear his teachings.

This time the kingdom is like a treasure discovered in a field. That discovery sets off a whole process of response in the one who discovers – joy at the value of the discovery, action to prepare for a connection to the valued discovery, and further action to secure the connection. The man is overjoyed at what he has found, sells all he has, and acquires the field to secure the treasure.

The key point in this parable is that the kingdom is a surprising find that is deserving of the total investment of all that we have – heart, body, mind, and soul.

The underlying tone is one of joy and satisfaction in securing a connection to this find of unique value.

The focus throughout the similitude is the behaviour of the finder, how he takes whatever steps needed to participate in the kingdom.

There are some teachings about the kingdom here that we have already heard in the other similitudes in this 13th chapter of Matthew.

The kingdom is present to be found. It has been initiated in the work of Jesus Christ and is already at work within us, among us, and around us. It is awaiting recognition of its value and worth. That recognition of the grace that is offered in Jesus Christ then draws forth a response of overwhelming joy and gratitude.

From that delight, we participate willingly and fully
in the work of Jesus Christ
as he leads the congregations of his church
in building the kingdom in their neighbourhoods.

So, we find, we are filled with joy,
we take whatever radical steps are needed
to ensure a connection with the treasure,
and we flourish in the service of the kingdom of heaven.

This is a parable that urges us to recognize what time it is.
It is time to celebrate the presence of the kingdom,
to make the changes that will enable us to participate fully in its unfolding,
and to enjoy that participation so much
that we want to invite others to share it.

Participation in the unfolding of the kingdom of God,
in joyful community with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
and with all the others who have recognized the value of this treasure,
is the most valuable thing in the world.

It is worth any price to focus on enjoying this life.

And the kingdom unfolds, as we have seen,
as all those who have discovered the treasure
use it to bless the whole of creation.

It unfolds as we pay attention to every opportunity
the Spirit provides us

to practice the gifts of the Spirit –

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and self-control -

and bless both the people of this earth and their environment
so we all can flourish and thrive as God intends.

The radical cost of securing this treasure,
interestingly enough,
is simply giving up anything that gets in the way of this kind of living.

Take some time this week to reflect
on what's getting in the way of,
what's interfering with,
you living out the gifts of the Spirit in your daily lives.

Take five minutes a day for the next six days
and make a list of the things that you recognize
as barriers to flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ
in your life right now.

Then let go of them.

You may want to do this in some kind of ritual.
Here's something simple.
Put the list you generate this week
into an sealed envelope marked 'Barriers',
bring it to worship next Sunday,
and let it go into the collection plate.
We won't open those envelopes.
We'll just take them as they are and shred them.
You will have cleared up a lot of the clutter in your life
that's getting in the way of flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ.
You will have given it up to God
with a prayer of joy for the freedom you enjoy in the kingdom.

Or you can create your own, more private, ritual.
The key thing is to let go of what's interfering with flourishing in the faith.

Whatever those rituals may be, they will work best
if you consciously intend to give things up
in order to participate more fully in the building of God's kingdom
through your life and witness in companionship with Jesus Christ and his church.
You are giving something up in order to enjoy something far greater in value.
Without the recognition of that greater value,
the giving up is meaningless.

Participation in the building of the kingdom,
in community with the Holy Trinity
and all others who recognize this treasure of unique value,
is the only way to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

This parable confronts us with the urgency of that choice.
Participate and flourish.
Pass by and flounder.

With Jesus Christ as our supportive companion,
and the people of Brentwood as our welcoming co-workers,
I know we will flourish
as we do our part to share this treasure with our neighbours.