

Provoked by the Parables

The Pearl

February 20, 2011

**Psalm 119:33-40 & Matthew 13:45-46
(Hymns – 78, 625, 479, 828)**

We learn best about what we love most.

I have had a life-long love of learning.
I was curious as a child,
driving my parents to distraction at times
with that wonderfully irritating question,
“Why?”

I was a voracious reader,
Everything from the Freddy the Pig series at the Niagara Falls Public Library,
to the set of Charles Dickens in the walnut bookcase my Dad had made
that sat next to his chair,
to Classics Comics,
to cereal boxes.

I still can't eat a bowl of cereal with the box on the table
without reading every side of the box.

Then I went on and did 4 degrees.
a graduate certificate in executive coaching,
researched and wrote 11 books,
researched and delivered a sermon most weeks while in the parish,
prepared and taught classes most weeks while teaching, ...
Well, you get the picture of someone who loves learning and sharing it.

I have no idea how many books I've read, but it's a lot.
I don't even know how many books I have, but it's a lot.
I can't remember how many books I gave to the VST library
When I left St. Andrew's Hall and VST back in 2002,
but that gift got me a \$15,000 tax receipt,
so it must have been a lot.

The section of Psalm 119 that we read together this morning
got me thinking about what I love learning about most.
That's an important question
that we don't spend a lot of time considering.

But I have come up with an answer for me.
I am engaged and energized by a love of learning
when I am focused on how human beings have inspired
to change their attitudes and behaviours
to achieve the beneficial consequences
that will bless the world.

That's probably the kind of vocabulary you'd expect
of a guy with four degrees and a big library,
who makes his living cramming as much meaning as he can imagine
into a few words as possible.

What's I'm really trying to convey
is that I learn best when I'm focused
on how people change the world for the better
and helping those who want to step into that way of being do it.

That, for me at least, is the pearl that is unusually fine,
of greatest value in relationship to the gifts that God has given me.

I wonder what it is for you.
What is that focus that will release your love of learning?
What is the gift God has given you
that will excite you most in developing it?
What is the blessing you have been called to offer to the world
that will inspire and energize your whole being
into flourishing as a friend of Jesus Christ in your circles of influence?

It's a spiritual discipline to answer these questions,
not just once, but as a life-long way of being.
It takes intention and discipline,
but it brings delicious delight.

It's a process of remembering who God intended you to be,
discovering what you love most as that unique friend of God,
and being true to that calling to be fully yourself
in everything you do.

I believe intensely that everyone is on a search for this pearl of being.
How have I been made by God to change the world for the better?
We all are looking for the answer to that question.
We look in some very strange and very unsatisfying places,
but that is the core quest in human life.

The parable of the Pearl has a simple and direct answer to that question –
you have been made to contribute to the building of God's kingdom.

You have been made to flourish as a blessing
wherever you may find yourself sent by God
as an ambassador of Christ and his kingdom.

Living this quality of life,
being in this kind of relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
is the greatest worth you can enjoy in this world and the next.
We get to dance around in delight as we change the world for the better.
That change begins with ourselves.
Being alive to the gifts of the Spirit
helps us create the space for others to be the same.

We don't actually change others.
That's the work of the Holy Spirit.
But we can create the physical and spiritual space
in which the Holy Spirit can work with us and through us
to nourish people to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Just think for a moment about the quality of space you would create
if you were to really free to focus on *being* the gifts of the Spirit –
love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,
faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

I can't think of a better vision of being in Christ and with Christ in his kingdom
than imagining how you might bring your unique gifts
into the service of this quality of being a blessing in the world.

This is a pearl of unimaginable value,
worth giving up everything of lesser value to achieve.
And in the giving up comes an even richer treasure.

That richer treasure is being in Christ and with Christ in his kingdom.
It is only hidden because we are blinded
by the bling and brightness of lesser treasures.
If we are true to our search for the richest of meaning,
for the true relationship with the very source of our beings,
then we will settle for nothing less than the love that God offers in Jesus Christ.
And we will spend our lives delightfully
learning what it really means to flourish in that love.