

+ Matthew 13:44-46, 51-52 + The Search for True Treasure + 8th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 30 July 2017 +

If you discovered something truly valuable, would you know what you had? Would you know how much it's really worth? Once you know the worth, what would you do with the treasure? People have been searching for hidden treasure for centuries. Just google "treasure finds" and you'll get millions of stories. For example, just two years ago scuba divers searching the seabed off the coast of the ancient city of Caesarea in northern Israel thought they had found a child's toy. In reality they had uncovered a priceless collection of 2,000 gold coins from the 10th-12th centuries.¹

Countless movies depict the adventurous search and discovery of famous, long-lost treasures that defy belief...and price. Certain shows have become popular based on the premise of discovering or recovering unexpected treasure. So-called "pickers" dig through dilapidated barns and sheds in search of unexpected treasures. People bring antiques or collectibles to an appraiser or a pawn store owner to find out how much they're really worth.

Sometime the item's owner finds out their treasure is a fake, a copy, or just junk. Other times they bring in an item that's truly rare, even priceless. Jaws drop when the owner finds out its real worth. For example, one man brought a set of five 18th Century Chinese carved rhinoceros horn cups to be appraised. The man had purchased the cups for \$5,000 years before and never knew what he had. They were appraised at \$1.5 million.²

If you discovered something truly valuable, would you know what you had? Would you know how much it's really worth? What would you do with that treasure? This morning we follow two men who find priceless treasure, but we're not about to start digging through our attics or backyards for treasure. No, Jesus takes us on a search for genuine treasure worth far more than any other on the face of the earth—a treasure found on the worn pages of an old book, a treasure given to us freely from God himself. Today we **SEARCH FOR TRUE TREASURE!**

The truth is, treasure hunting isn't as adventurous or exciting as the movies make it out to be. It's not usually as dangerous or dramatic. Typically, finding treasure takes a lot of hard work, a lot of patience, a lot of fruitless searches, and requires a lot of help. Large crowds were following Jesus everywhere. They had seen his miracles and hung on his every word. At the heart of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of heaven—not some grand, earthly empire of the future, but God going out into the world with his Word to save people like us. It's an amazing concept that's also hard to understand like holding a treasure in your hand and having no idea what it's worth. So Jesus provides help so we can understand how valuable his kingdom really is.

To reveal the priceless worth of his heavenly treasure, Jesus used parables—earthly stories that help us to understand a heavenly concept like the kingdom of heaven. Unfortunately, many in the crowds completely missed what Jesus was teaching them. They thought it was nice that he spoke about farming and fishing, but they missed the treasure he was trying to reveal.

Not so for his disciples! Yes, at times even they had difficulty recognizing the treasure Jesus was trying to reveal to them. A couple weeks ago, we heard how those disciples asked, **"Explain to us the parable..."** (Matthew 13:36) When Jesus started describing the kingdom of heaven like a treasure buried in a field or a priceless pearl, with the Spirit's help, they finally recognized the treasure right under their noses. Like an experienced appraiser, Jesus revealed how precious his heavenly treasure really is.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied." A man is walking out in a field that doesn't belong to him, when something catches his eye. He bends down and starts brushing some of the dirt away from the shiny object. The more he brushes, the more excited he gets. Buried in that field is a priceless treasure! The man realizes what he's found. He knows exactly how valuable it is, so he reburies the treasure. **"In his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field."** When that man walked into that field, he wasn't looking for treasure, but he found it. He was so impressed that he gave up everything he had to own that field where he found that treasure. Nothing else mattered more.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one priceless pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it." A merchant in pearls spends countless hours in countless locations trying to find **"fine pearls"** to buy and sell. One day as he searches through another batch of pearls in another nameless location he discovers **"one priceless pearl"**— the rarest and most valuable of

¹ <http://mentalfloss.com/article/90883/7-biggest-treasure-troves-ever-found>

² <http://ew.com/tv/antiques-roadshow-most-valuable/5-18th-century-gianlong-jade-collection-from-qing-dynasty/>

pearls. He knows what he holds in his hand, and he knows how much it's worth. He's so impressed with that **"one priceless pearl"** that he sells everything to own it for himself. Nothing else matters more.

When true treasure was found, both men realized its worth and gave up everything to possess it. As amazing as their treasures were, do you realize that you have a treasure even greater? It has little value in the marketplace, but it has priceless value for you. It will not increase your bank account, but its value will far outlast any earthly source of revenue. It's not impressive by the world's standards. Most people don't even realize its value. Yet for you it has life-changing, life-giving power. For you it proves its worth day after day. The treasure of which I speak is the Word of God—the Word that speaks of Jesus who came to live and die and rise again for you. Do you realize what kind of a treasure you have in the good news of your Savior Jesus Christ?

We have to admit that we do see God's Word as a treasure, but we all seem to forget how priceless it really is. Maybe you pull it out when times are tough, when illness or death or financial concern touches your life. You see its worth when you come to church on Sundays. You give it plenty of lip service about how important it is to you, but deep down you take it for granted more often than not. You fail to treasure God's Word.

You allow it to gather dust on your shelf when you need it to give you life day after day. You fail to realize what a treasure you have in God's Word when you allow yourself to live and think and talk like people who don't have that precious treasure. You let your self-centered heart take you on a wild-goose chase looking for worldly treasure, only to leave you empty inside and wondering if it's all worth it. You keep searching and restlessly looking for true treasure, even though it's right here on the pages of God's Word.

How often don't you and I fail to recognize how priceless a treasure we have in God's Word, in that wonderful good news that tells us about sins forgiven and life complete through our Savior Jesus Christ? If we did, then every time we open God's Word, we would be like little kids opening presents on Christmas. What's inside? It's not fake. It's not treasure that wears out or breaks or can get stolen. No, it's joy. It's peace. It's patience. It's self-control. It's forgiveness for the guilt of sins long past and present sins of weakness. It's holiness and above all, it's love—not your love for God which tries to make him give you this precious treasure. No, it's his boundless love that defies the limits of your imagination, boundless love that moves God to send his Son to put himself in your place, to suffer your loss and your death, and to become your Savior from sin.

You can't put a price on that! The Apostle Peter, who learned the value of this treasure from Jesus himself, later wrote, **"For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb."** (1 Peter 1:18-19) Doesn't that appraisal cause a "Wow!" of delight to rise up from the depths of your soul? Finding out the value of this treasure makes your jaw drop and changes your life because God gave up his greatest, his most priceless treasure for you.

So what will you do with that treasure now that you know how priceless it is? Will you tuck it away for safekeeping, perhaps lock it up in a vault with armed guards or simply put it on the highest shelf in your house where it can't be lost or disturbed? Such a treasure from God himself is too valuable to put away for safekeeping. Jesus addressed this very question with another parable. After asking his disciples if they understood his teaching, he said, **"Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom treasures new and old."** Having the treasure of God's Word makes you well-equipped for every situation like a homeowner with well-stocked storerooms.

So what will you do with all that treasure? Jesus wants you to put it to use! How do you do that? It starts with growing in grace. How can you put that treasure to use if you don't spend personal time in God's Word, studying God's Word with others, and taking in that Word each week in worship? With that treasure, Jesus trains you to live, to witness, and to serve him.

Consider how many people out there have no idea how valuable a treasure God's Word really is, but you do! What can you do with that treasure? You can live in such a way that it's clear how priceless the treasure of God's Word is to you, that nothing else matters more. You can let that be the key to your marriage, your family life, your life in the world working and playing. You can live like those treasure hunters who found priceless treasure and gave up everything to have it. That means be willing to give up your time, your talents, and the money God has given you so you and other can share that treasure because nothing matters more!

You see, the treasure of God's Word matters most because on its pages we find what we need most. Rather than hoard that treasure for yourself, you can share that treasure liberally with everyone you know and love. After all, God's treasure will never diminish. Think of it. You have the opportunity to share the greatest treasure

in all of creation with your loved ones simply by telling them about your Savior. Sound impossible? Sound dangerous? In Jesus, you can do it. Let Jesus train you to use it wisely—and then reveal it to your world!

Do you realize the treasure you have? Do you know what it's worth? In Jesus and his Word, your search for true treasure ends. That treasure lasts for eternity. No price tag can be put on that treasure. Now with his training, you can use it wisely so many more can enjoy that same true treasure for all eternity. In Jesus, nothing matters more. Amen.