**Year A – Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Matthew 13:44-52**

**August 13, 2017**

The Gospel is Our Greatest Possession

1. Treasure it! (Vv44-45)
2. Heed its call! (Vv46-50)
3. Share it! (Vv51-52)

Introduction

What if I told you that I knew where to find an unlimited supply of money? Yep, and if you were to just meet me here tomorrow, I will lead you to the place where all this money is hidden. Bring your friends and families and everyone you know, because there is an infinite amount of money here. Enough so that you and anyone who joins us tomorrow will be able to retire and do whatever they want for the rest of their lives. They can travel anywhere and buy anything they want, and their needs will certainly be taken care of for the rest of their lives as well.

I imagine that if what I said was true and you knew it, word would spread very quickly around town. And in the internet age in which we live, perhaps word would spread very quickly on social media sites too. And tomorrow morning there wouldn’t just be a couple of us here. There would be hundreds, thousands, even millions of people would show up! Who wouldn’t want to receive an easier, more comfortable life, with unlimited resources?

But, friends, we do have that treasure already! We have it in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And not only has he won unlimited wealth for us in heaven, the wealth he has won for us lasts forever! And not only is it unlimited and lasts forever, but there is also not a touch of pain for eternity! We won’t have to worry at all anymore, we will live in peace and joy! That is our reality, and is the reality for all who believe.

Today we continue through Jesus’ parables, and he gives us four important ones, rapidly in succession. He reminds us that the gospel is our greatest possession.

Setting the scene

Last week we mentioned that as we follow the three-year rotation of readings, the lectionary, we get treated to a well-rounded feast of the gospel. We are in our final lesson of this section of the lectionary which covers the parables of Jesus. Last week we mentioned that a “parable” is “an earthly story which illustrates a heavenly truth”. It is also important to remember that a parable has one main point of comparison. We need not get caught up in all the details of the parable, because there is typically only one point that is being made.

We also covered what the “kingdom of heaven” is that Jesus refers to in his parables. In today’s parables it again refers to the sphere of gospel activity, or the proclamation of the gospel. It means God’s activity during this time of grace, our lives on earth, in which he calls sinners to faith and salvation through the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament.

When we left Jesus and the disciples last week, they had left the crowds and were in a house, and Jesus was explaining the parable of the wheat and the weeds. He immediately launches into the next series of parables today.

Part 1: Treasure it! (Vv44-45)

Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Since the fall into sin, there has been an emptiness in the lives of people. Human beings are born separated from God. In fact, even from the time they were conceived, they were sinful. David says in Psalm 51:5, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” They know that there is something lacking in their very existence.

And all are born with a natural knowledge of God’s law. People by nature know that murder is wrong, adultery is wrong, treating someone poorly is wrong. This natural knowledge of God’s law is called a conscience. And so people naturally know that there is something horribly wrong with them, and they have a spiritual restlessness. They long to find what they’ve been missing.

And so, in the human attempt to fill this void, virtually every people of every time in every corner of the planet have had a god or gods they have worshipped. But every false god that has been invented by humans demands some sort of work-righteousness. As in, you must work to save yourself. Ancient false gods demanded sacrifices—often human sacrifices. Modern false gods--such as Allah, false god of the Muslims—demand submission to the pillars of Islam. Even many mainline Christian denominations here in America demand some sort of work-righteousness. Some say you must ask Jesus into your heart or have some kind of “conversion experience” outside of means of grace. Others say Jesus’ sacrifice wasn’t enough—you must earn your salvation by works. In fact, most so-called Christian churches in America don’t even believe the entire Bible to be the Word of God! They believe that it’s open to human interpretation.

And so humans have made things very confusing and even flat-out false. In doing so, they have burdened people’s consciences. They have left people wondering if they have ever done enough to please God. How can you be sure you’ve done enough? What a burden it is to think that way!

But in the gospel of true Christianity, in the teachings of Christ, we find more than enough. We find that Jesus lived perfectly in our place, that he sacrificed himself for our salvation, that he rose from the dead to win eternal life for us. We could have never satisfied God’s laws. We could never do enough. So Jesus did it for us. And heaven is ours because of him.

So we are like the man and the merchant in this parable. The man sells everything he has to buy the field with abundant treasure in it. The merchant sells everything he owns for the pearl of great value. Nothing in life matters nearly as much as the treasure of the gospel message. And so it dominates our lives. We no longer find our identities in worldly things, such as our professions, our hobbies, our achievements. We find our identities in being children of God. We no longer lustily seek to gain and gain and gain money for ourselves, rather we seek to give as much back to our Lord as possible. We no longer live for our pleasures and leisure, but we live to hear God’s Word and take his Sacraments.

Part 2: Heed its call! (Vv47-50)

And so, we not only treasure the gospel today and then forget about it tomorrow. Rather, we heed its call every day. Jesus says, “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad fish away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

By God’s grace, we have been blessed to have a church here at Gethsemane for many decades. We have put down our nets and gathered as many people into our congregation as possible. Many truly believe. Praise God for them! But in every congregation there are probably some hypocrites, who go through the motions but their hearts are somewhere else. Perhaps they give a show of piety for one hour a week, then live the rest of the time as if they have never heard of their Savior’s forgiveness or will for their lives. Some like to be associated with “good” Christian people. It makes them look good. It’s good for their reputations, good for their business. Others give the impression of being servants of Christ, but secretly remain slaves to sin and Satan. Their pet sins rule their hearts and dominate their lives. Their Christianity is a sham. And Jesus says the bad fish will be thrown out into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Has that described any of us? If so, there is still time. If that has described you, the answer is repentance. And what an opportunity you have this very day! In just a few minutes we will receive the Lord’s body and blood. Before we do that, you examine yourself for all sin. And you come to the Lord’s table and receive his forgiveness. He gives you his body and blood, and the forgiveness of sins, and the opportunity to no longer live in your sin, but rather to turn from your sin and live for Him! Heed the call of that precious gospel!

Part 3: Share it! (Vv51-52)

And share it! “’Have you understood all these things?’ Jesus asked. ‘Yes,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.’”

You may know that Bill Gates is the richest man in America. His net worth is estimated at almost $90 billion! His home alone is worth about $125 million. And in that home he has incredible features, such as six kitchens, 24 bathrooms, and a reception hall that can accommodate up to 200 guests. There are paintings on the walls that change according to what artist the guest prefers, there’s a trampoline room, a 23-car garage, an enormous pool with its own underwater music system, and the list goes on and on. He even once paid $30 million for an original Da Vinci manuscript that he keeps in his massive library. People have paid thousands just to tour his home! Can you imagine how amazed you would be just to see the place, to see all the treasures he has, both old and new!

Yet you have more. If you are our confirmed member, you have been thoroughly instructed in all the doctrines of God’s Word. If you aren’t our member, we’d love to instruct you in these things. I pray that no matter where you are spiritually, whether you are a more mature Christian or whether you still have lots of questions, I pray that you never stop being instructed in the Word. And so, you have a storeroom full of treasures both old and new. You have traced the line of the Savior through the Old Testament, and you have seen in the New Testament whom that Savior was—Jesus Christ. And so, you possess the treasure that saves for eternity.

So get busy sharing it. Time is wasting. People are perishing. It’s up to you and me as those who possess the infinite treasures of the gospel message to share it with others. Look for any opportunity whatsoever to meet people, to get to know people, to share the gospel with them. Because every person you meet is going to one of two places. Will you share the treasure with them, or will you keep it hidden because that just seems to be more comfortable?

You have the greatest possession possible—the gospel. So treasure it! Heed its calling! Share it! Amen.