

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today we are treated to more of Jesus' parables, and we're going to consider together two of them: the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. The Parable of the Net is in meaning similar to Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Weeds, talking about "*the end of the age*," so I'll not take that one up today. Jesus supplies no explanation to these parables, but He has provided a process of interpretation of parables, so we'll employ that as we try to understand these two parables, for remember, Jesus did not teach in parables to make everything simple and easy to understand. Indeed, the very opposite.

Yes, as we analyze these parables, we begin as Jesus showed us. We'll identify who the major players are and what they symbolize: the man, the field, the treasure, the act of purchasing, or again, the merchant, the pearl, and the act of purchasing.

In the two parables we've already considered, a man went out sowing; he went out to His field, sowing good seed. In each case, we discovered, Jesus was that man, or as Jesus identified Him, the Son of Man. That also seems a good choice for the man or the merchant in today's parables.

And yet, identifying Jesus as the treasure or the precious pearl is also attractive. You might think, right away, of the hymn, "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" (LSB743), that identifies Christ as a treasure. "Jesus, priceless treasure, Fount of purest pleasure, Truest friend to me." It continues, "Ah, how long in anguish Shall my spirit languish, Yearning, Lord, for Thee?" and says, "I will suffer naught to hide Thee" (st. 1). The hymn goes on to proclaim: "Hence all earthly treasure! Jesus is my pleasure. Jesus is my choice" (st. 4), and concludes by affirming, come what may, Jesus will remain "my purest pleasure, Jesus, priceless treasure" (st. 6).

In fact, you in your confirmation have affirmed something similar, namely, "to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it" — and that means to suffer all rather than be separated from Christ, the Church's head. "Jesus, priceless treasure."

In fact, early church fathers, like second century father, Irenaeus thinks this way. He "refers to Christ as the treasure that was hidden in the world" [Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew 11:2-20:34*, 712-3].

Luther is similar, though a little different. He says that "Christ speaks of the gospel as a treasure which is hidden in a field [Matt. 13:44]." But that gospel, he says, "is a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and peace. It is a word of salvation, a word of grace, a word

of comfort, a word of joy, a voice of the bridegroom and the bride, a good word, a word of peace" (*Luther's Works*, 31:230-1).

Surely no one would disagree with these two that Christ is a treasure, and the Gospel news of Jesus as Savior is a treasure. Luther calls the Gospel "the true treasure of the church" (*Luther's Works*, 31:230). They're both right. That message is worth more than all other messages we might hear—that we are forgiven of our many sins, that we have been redeemed by Jesus' precious blood, that we have been sought, found, and saved from death and the devil by Jesus, that Jesus has cleansed us by the washing of water and the word, that He gives us today a meal that strengthens our faith and gives us life. What a treasure all that is!

And yet, I submit, that in these parables, Jesus is not the treasure hidden in the field; He is not the pearl of great price. Nor are we the one who acts in this way to sell all that we have to possess it. Such a reading makes Jesus passive in the order of salvation and makes us to be the main actor. In other words, it turns the Gospel into Law.

No, salvation by man's own strivings is as impossible as squeezing a camel through the eye of a needle. "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*" (Matt. 19:24-26). No, as we think on these parables, we need to think on them such that God Himself, or Christ Himself, is the actor, like in those previous parables: Christ is the sower; Christ is the sower of good seed; Christ is the one casting the net. Christ is the man; Christ is the merchant.

Now, to be sure, the man in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure engages in a bit of trickery, even perhaps thievery to acquire the treasure. That troubles some. But our own David Scaer says that Jesus sometimes uses "otherwise unacceptable metaphors" to describe His zeal for "accomplishing [the world's] redemption." St. Paul expresses that zeal in his letter to the Philippians; I'll use the King James version to here to make the connection. St. Paul says of Jesus that although He was "*in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*" (Phil. 2:6-7 KJV). And Paul speaks of Jesus' further humility: "*he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Phil. 2:8 KJV).

This is what Jesus did. He broke into our fallen world, and He, who is not by nature man, came as a trespasser into our human flesh to seek and save what was lost. Jesus is the One who sold everything, if you will, giving up His own life so that He could redeem you, that is, purchase and win you "from sin, from death and from the power of the devil," as Luther says it in the catechism, "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death." And all this, that you might "be His own and live under Him in His

kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (Luther, Small Catechism, “Second Article of the Creed”).

That’s how C.F.W. Walther also used this text, connecting it with Jesus’ stated purpose “*to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10). Speaking for Jesus, Walther preaches: “Remember how much it cost me to be able to seek and to save the lost. For this reason I left heaven behind and came to earth. . . . There can be nothing else that is my joy and desire, but to save them. For finding souls who were lost is the single reward for my bitter work. They are the single fruit of my harsh suffering. They are the single prize for my heated battle. They are the single pearl whom I have delivered myself into the bottomless pit of their misery to find” (Walther, *Occasional Sermons and Addresses of Dr. C.F.W. Walther*, tr. Joel Baseley, p. 103).

So, Jesus is the man; He enters a field and finds a treasure that He wants to purchase; He purchases it with His own life blood. So, what is the treasure? We are that treasure! We are the pearl! Indeed, that’s what Moses writes in our Old Testament lesson, speaking, if you will, to the Church: “*you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession*”—and not because you of yourselves are so great (or so good, or so holy), but out of His great love for you. This is who you are when seen through the lens of His Son. You are the treasure worth the precious blood of Jesus.

But actually, our District President, President Brege, pointed out this week, it’s even more. I hadn’t thought of this. He pointed out that the man didn’t just buy the treasure in that first parable. He bought the whole field—is that field the same as in the Parable of the Weeds, the world? Dr. Brege titled his email “He Bought Entire Field,” and went on to connect that to Scripture’s teaching of God’s love not just for one or some, but for the whole world, giving His own Son unto the cross for the world—John 3:16—and pointing to other such Scriptures, like “*in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*” (2 Cor. 5:19), and Christ is “*the [atoning sacrifice] ... for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). All to acquire His treasured possession, Christ died for the sins of the world.

Dear saints, isn’t this pure Gospel? It feels so good to know you are loved—certainly that’s so for husbands and wives, parents and children, to know that you are loved and that you will be there for each other. How much more to know that “*God is for*” you, as St. Paul says, that you are His valuable treasure, His pearl of great price, bought with the price of Jesus’ blood. How good it is to know that when “*tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword*” assail you, the God “*who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all*” is there for you, not to charge you or condemn you, but to justify you and forgive you by Christ, “*the one who died—more than that, who was raised*” for

you! How good it is to know that He is even now *“interceding for [you]”* and working things out for your good! And knowing this, how good it is to be able to say with St. Paul: *“we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.