

Hidden Treasure

1Kings 3:5-12; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:44-58

Have you ever been disappointed in Church? I don't mean simply the temperature in the building, singing a hymn you don't know, or an overlong sermon. I don't even mean the way in which sadly some of those in the church have behaved, and the way you may be been treated.

I mean something rather more global. The Church can seem so powerless, we can seem so few. The things that we hold to be so important are ridiculed by many in the world around us, our message seems lost in the glitter and glamour of our materialist world, it can be all very disappointing. The wonder of what we have seems so hidden from so many.

We may think it would be different if Jesus were here, if he was to turn up that would change things. But we hear in our Gospel reading that people were just as dismissive of him *and he could do miracles*. They were disappointed in him, if there was something special about him it was hidden from them.

Well, as we look more widely at the reading we will see that Jesus is speaking of hidden things which contain hidden meanings which will remind us no matter how disappointing things may seem as we gather we are considering things that are immensely valuable and universally powerful.

THIS IS TREASURE (51-52)

As we rejoin Matthew 13 Jesus has been speaking in parables, earthly tales with heavenly meanings for the rest of the Chapter and he has been speaking of the Kingdom of Heaven, the rule of God. And I suspect that what Jesus has been saying has been rather disappointing to many of those listening. When they thought of the Kingdom of Heaven, they thought of God raising up his people, putting them back on top and particularly getting rid of the Romans from the land. Yet here is Jesus telling pastoral agricultural stories of seeds, weeds and mustard trees.

Yet Jesus, as he comes to the end of his story telling, compares his teaching to treasures and wants to know that his disciples have understood what he is saying. They, perhaps given their lack of understanding on other occasions, say "Yes", but we, the readers, may be wondering if we have.

As we dig a little deeper we can see that the Jesus says that a scribe, a teacher of the law, someone who understood the Hebrew Scriptures, who also now understands his teaching about the Kingdom has new treasures in his storehouse. Amazingly Jesus is claiming that his teaching is as important or even surpasses the teaching of the Old Testament, God's word.

These stories with hidden meanings then are well worth our attention.

HIDDEN TREASURE

At the start of our passage are two very well known parables which make the same point. Someone finds something of inestimable worth which whilst not obvious to all is worth selling all for. We could change the first parable perhaps to the parable of the winning lottery ticket worth millions which was in a house that was going up for auction and it is worth selling all to get hold off. The second if I was to retell it for me would be the parable of the great CD, that I found a CD that had so much stuff on it that it was worth selling all my other CDs for.

It is worth modernising these stories to make sure that we don't misunderstand them. The first point that Jesus is clearly making is that the deals that both of these people make, selling all for the field with the treasure or the pearl of great price, are not

crazy badly informed decisions, they make good sense, good business sense what is obtained is worth far more than what is given in exchange.

This is important because how these parables are often preached is "Are you willing to give up everything for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven?" This seems to be a little odd to me because that does not seem the point the parables. The characters in these stories do not wrestle with the issue of whether the deals are worth making, with "are they willing?" Rather they well understand the deal they are making is a good one and go through with it with joy.

The question then should not be are you willing to sell all, but rather do you realise just how wonderful and great is the Kingdom of Heaven of which Jesus is speaking. If we understand this then whatever we may have to give up for it we will do so joyfully.

The Value of the Kingdom

If we scan back over the Gospel of Matthew we can see how wonderful the Kingdom is: we see that the Kingdom is the way of blessedness, we see that it is the way of wisdom, we see that it is the way of security, a house build on the rock, we see that it is the way of rest, and the way of hope, for Jesus has just spoken of the children of the Kingdom shining like the sun.

Over the past few weeks when it has been cold, wet and grey as we get in the car to go to school my children have taken to saying very sarcastically "Hobart – the way life should be" Well the Kingdom is about the way life should be, both the way we should live it now and the life we were created for in the future.

If Jesus' hearers had grasped this they would have happily given up their nationalistic notions, their longing for power and revenge, all that they had thought important to grasp this most valuable treasure. If we understand we will give up things that will seem so petty and unimportant, our angers, selfishness, our materialism to take hold of this kingdom, the way life should be.

The parables warn us that not everyone will see what we think is so important, it will be hidden from them, or they are not looking for it, but its value remains.

I think I have spoken before of Jim Elliott, a missionary who was martyred last century, who had written in his diary these words "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Not everyone may see the value of the Kingdom but we should not doubt it.

HIDDEN NET

As we come to the last parable I suspect a literary critic could accuse Jesus mixing his metaphors and puzzling pictures for there seems to be no connection between the previous parables and this one as we move from an agricultural to an aquatic setting.

Perhaps this is part of the teaching technique so we will take a double take and take the time to think about what is being taught. For what we discover here is that if the parable of treasure and the pearl spoke of the inestimable worth of the Kingdom even if it was hidden from some, this parable says that this same hiddenness of the Kingdom does not mean that it will not have universal impact.

Now I am sure there are people here who know more about fishing than I do but I assume that part of the point of a net is that the fish don't see it they keep doing their thing (or even fin), until they are caught in it. Certainly the work of the net is not clear from the surface until it is bought in, but when it is time to pull it in its power is clear. Certainly in the Old Testament the drag net is a symbol of kingly power and so it is here. We may not see it, we may not know that it is doing its work, but Jesus' is teaching that we can be assured that one day we will.

As in the earlier parable of the weeds there is then a separation between the wicked and the righteous with disastrous consequences for the wicked.

The idea of judgement and punishment is not a popular these days but we should note a couple of things. Firstly Jesus speaks more about judgement than any other person in the Scriptures, we cannot excise it from our thinking without radically changing our understanding of Jesus. But we should also note that Jesus speaks of it not to those on the outside but those on the inside. It is an encouragement to us to change our ways and in this case be good fish. It is a reminder to us that who we are is not hidden from God and a day of revealing will take place.

The Kingdom is not only valuable, but it is also powerful and serious.

WHAT WAS BURIED NOW REVEALED.

I believe that this is all true, the Kingdom is valuable and powerful but there is still a sense that the answer is disappointing. How do we know that this is true? Is teaching this enough to deal with the disappointment of the way things look?

As I reflected on this I realised that we have more than these parables to make Jesus point. Firstly the treasure of the Kingdom which Jesus came to bring continued to be hidden from many. Ultimately it wasn't just those of his home town who rejected him it was his entire nation and this greatest of treasures himself was hidden in a field, in a tomb. Yet God took ownership and raised up the one who have given all he had. In the resurrection of Jesus we have the truth of these parables underlined, and reinforced for us.

Firstly Jesus resurrection points forward to the judgement. Paul says in Acts 17:31 that God "commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." When I feel disappointed in the Church and its influence I need not doubt Jesus' power. A day of reckoning is coming, not only because Jesus taught it but because by the resurrection God has appointed him as the judge.

But secondly and just as importantly the resurrection if possible revalues the treasure of the Kingdom upwards for it gives us a hope which will not be disappoint. As our reading from Romans 8 reminds us thinking about the confidence that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead brings we can be convinced 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.

Jesus taught and his resurrection shows that whilst the Kingdom of Heaven may not seem impressive in the kingdom of this world we need not doubt either its power or its value, ultimately it will not disappoint. It would be disappointing if we didn't grasp this, or if it was a treasure that we didn't want to share.