

Faith Mennonite Church  
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## **Two Reflections on the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value** *Matthew 13:44-46*

Through these two parables, Jesus discusses “The Kingdom of Heaven.” He does not define the Kingdom; instead he uses the parables to describe its value. Before we get into the parables, I have a question: Aside from what the parable says the Kingdom is like, what exactly *is* the Kingdom of Heaven?

As a new Christian, I found the phrase confusing and I was also pretty worried, as an educated person, that it would be some kind of fairytale and like being transported to heaven in the *Left Behind* series. I come from a family of highly skeptical, nonbelievers who must have evidence to back up their beliefs. And I felt anxious about their reactions to my new faith.

The best explanation I have come across is from William Barclay who wrote essays explaining Biblical passages. In his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer he says that the line “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven is an example of parallelism, often used in the Psalm in which the first part of phrase or an expression is defined and amplified by the second half of the phrase. Such as in Psalm 23, the first phrase: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, is followed by a description and amplification: he leads me beside still waters and he restores my soul. So, by this reasoning, the Kingdom of God comes when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. That means when all of us on earth do God’s will as it is done in heaven, the kingdom will have come to the world. So what does that look like?

It depends on how we see God’s will. Perhaps it is a fatalistic expression – something bad happens and someone says with bitterness or gritting of teeth says the tragedy was *God’s will*. On the other hand, is God’s will as Jesus describes it? Love in action, hope, compassion, generosity, community, kindness, patience and gentleness. If all of us on earth practiced the will of God this way, or even if only you and I carried out these actions throughout our lives, then perhaps we will find that the Kingdom of Heaven is like what Jesus describes in the two parables.

The first parable has one main point, that the Kingdom of Heaven is like the joy of the discovery the man feels when he finds the treasure and this joy is so amazing that he is willing to give up everything he has to make the treasure his own. “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a hidden treasure in a field. A man finds the treasure, and, as a result of his *joy*, he *sells everything that he has, and buys the field*” (13:44).

In the first parable, the man found the treasure by chance while he was immersed in his daily activities. He stumbles on it unexpectedly, and he did so when he was working in a field. He probably was working hard, because hidden treasure probably was hidden well below the surface. It was not visible and he may have missed it if he merely scraped the surface. The other thing is, that he did NOT find the treasure on holy ground or in a church or on a religious occasion: He found it while working in a field that he didn’t even own. He had to go out and buy it.

Secondly, that it is worth any sacrifice to realize the Kingdom. Suddenly, just like the man discovered the treasure, we may have flash of its existence or a sudden insight when things become so clear or we may get a startling glimpse of what’s God’s will is for us and what it means. To accept it may require us to give up certain aims and ambitions which are very dear, to rid of ourselves of ways of thinking, habits and ways of life which are very difficult to change, or even to take on a new way of thinking and living, which is never easy. It is so challenging to let go of all our habits and patterns and trust in Jesus. But there is no other way to peace, serenity and heart in this life. Just that glimpse of how things would fall into place, the joy that comes with discovering that when you follow God’s will, anchored in love, mercy and compassion it is worth giving up everything you have to do it.

The Precious Pearl ([Matthew 13:45-46](#))

*“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant who was seeking goodly pearls. When he had found a very valuable pearl, he went away and sold everything he had, and bought it” (13:45-46).*

In the Biblical times pearls had a very special place. People desired to possess a lovely pearl, not just for its trade value, but also for its beauty. They found joy in simply handling it and looking at it.

To the people in the story, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions; that means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world. So to accept and to carry out the will of God is exquisitely beautiful. So it is not a grim, dark, agonizing thing; it is a lovely thing. So beyond the discipline, the sacrifice, and the self-control there lies the beauty that is nowhere else. There is only one way to bring peace to the heart, joy to the mind, beauty to life, and that is to accept and to do the will of God (William Barclay).

Also, the parable mentions pearls (plural), but only *one* pearl of great price. In other words, there are many fine things in this world and many things in which we can find beauty. Such as in knowledge, science, in art and music and literature and other pursuits; there is loveliness to be found in serving others, even if that service springs from humanitarian rather than from purely Christian motives; loveliness can be found in human relationships and in our families. These of course are all lovely, but they are not as precious as the one pearl. The greatest beauty lies in the acceptance of the will of God. This is not to belittle the other things; they too are pearls; but the supreme pearl is the following the path of obedience and faith.

This parable about the pearl makes the same point as the first parable but with a difference in how the Kingdom is found. The man who was digging in the field was not searching for treasure; it came on him unexpectedly while he is working. The merchant, on the other hand, searched for pearls his entire life. He knew what he was looking for and was thoughtful and methodical in his efforts and then gave up everything, including being a merchant, to possess the one pearl.

Both means of discovery are given equal weight in the parables. No matter whether the discovery was the result of a spectacular or earth shattering moment – perhaps coming from incredible loss or triumph or simply through the course of our experiences in daily living, or, like the merchant, it came through a lifetime search, studying theology, leading, participating or building a community of faith—the reaction was the same—everything had to be sold and sacrificed to gain the precious thing. Either way, we are left with the same truth: however we discover the will of God for ourselves, it is so lovely, so valuable that it is the only thing worth possessing. If we believe that the Kingdom of God is a state of society on earth where God's will is done as beautifully as it is done in heaven, it is worth everything to do God's will individually and as a community and leave all else behind so that love, peace, hope and compassion become the way for all of us on earth now or in the generations that follow. – *Susan James*

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#### The Pearl of Great Value

*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. Matthew 36: 45-46*

In the *Lord's Prayer*, we say, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” That tells me that the Kingdom of Heaven is not simply our reward in the hereafter. We imperfect beings, living in an imperfect world, are committing ourselves to fulfilling God's will here on earth as we understand it. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus instructs his followers to: “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness and all things shall be given to you.” Righteousness here is not only keeping the two Great Commandments, the first being: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and the second: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Righteousness, as the Old Testament prophets admonished the kings and the people of Israel, is the attaining of a more just society.

Here at Faith Mennonite Church, I see myself, through your discernment and guidance, as part of the Body of Christ on earth in a real and tangible way that I have never felt before. You live by the Two Great Commandments with no fanfare or attention calling but instead with integrity that forms and transforms your behavior and your relationships with one another. Amy-Jill Levine in her study of the parables of Jesus tells us that the merchant who has found the pearl of great value is no longer a merchant. He has sold all his other pearls for the sake of possessing this one pearl and that decision transforms his life. He has found his “ultimate concern,” and to her the parable asks us if we can decide what is “our own pearl...and if we know what is of ultimate concern to our neighbors.”

I saw last week, despite our sorrow over the racially-motivated killings at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and the horror of the continuing burning of Black churches in the South and elsewhere, that we could still rejoice over two US Supreme Court decisions. One had upheld the federal subsidies for the Affordable Care Act and another had ruled in favor of the nation-wide legalization of marriage for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. In these decisions, justice has been advanced and the Kingdom of Heaven has come closer to realization in our country in important ways.

As one new to your congregation, I have benefited by another lesson, which is not simply your teaching me the teachings of Jesus more profoundly than I have experienced before but also by the way you live according to the example Jesus set for us. As God-made-flesh he allowed himself to experience his temptations in the desert, his agony in Gethsemane, and the tortuous pain and suffering in the passion leading up to the humiliation of being nailed to the cross at Golgotha. In his crying out, in Mark, “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” his human anguish and suffering remains almost unbearable to contemplate. But that despair is not all. In Luke, he cries out on the cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

In the Charleston shootings, we felt despair. Not again! And not in church! But when the bereaved families and church members extended their forgiveness to the perpetrator, we saw their imitation of Christ manifested in their response, and we were deeply moved and again we rejoiced. When I combine all that I have learned from you as I strive to become a more faithful Christian, I want you to know that here in these walls, under this roof, I have found in you and your faith and commitment, my Pearl of Great Value. - *Shirley Leckie Reed*