

Matthew 13:44-52; Romans 8:28-39; Deuteronomy 7:6-9

“God’s Treasures” - Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Proper 12A (Pentecost 9) 2023

All three of our Scripture readings for today speak to those who, by the grace of God, believe in God’s love and promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. Unfortunately there are many in this world who are either unaware of God’s gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, or have rejected Jesus Christ as their Savior. But before I talk about how we can best deal with those who knowingly or unknowingly continue to be enemies of God and His Church, let’s consider some of the good news God has for us and our eternal future since knowing this good news enables us to grow better at sharing it with others.

We’ll start with our Gospel reading. If you look at the broader context, it’s obvious that Jesus is speaking not to the crowds at this point, but specifically to His disciples who believe in Him. In the first two parables, what or who would you say is the “*hidden treasure*” or “*pearl of great value*”? While you wouldn’t be wrong in thinking that Jesus Christ together with His Word and Sacraments are our greatest treasures, that’s not what Jesus is focusing on in these parables.

Our OT reading from Deuteronomy gives us the answer to my question. Speaking again to those who have faith in God, Moses said, “*The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*” God treasures and loves all people, but if we reject Him and His love—if we don’t want to be in His treasured possession, we will remain in the possession of Satan.

On the other hand, God tells us in both our OT and Gospel readings that we who, by the grace of God, love Him are His “*treasured possession*”—His “*pearl of great value.*” What a great comfort it is for us to know that we, like Jesus’ first disciples, are considered by God to be of such great value to Him.

The man in Jesus’ parable, who sold all that he had to buy that “*pearl of great value,*” represents Jesus who willingly sacrificed all that He had, including His very life, to buy us back. And when He has done so much to save us while we were still sinners, rejecting Him, how much more will He do for us now that we love Him?

St. Paul answers that question in our Epistle reading when he says that not only will nothing in all creation “*be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus,*” but that “*for those who love God all things work together for good.*” Certainly the evil in us and around us continue to do their best to separate us from God, but they’re not in control, God is. And God promises to work even through the pain, suffering and evil of this world for the good of His people—to make sure that we will in the end be with Him in paradise.

Joseph, in the OT, emphasized this truth when, after being thrown into a pit, and sold into slavery by his brothers, he later said to his brothers, “*you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive*” (Genesis 50:20). Now that Joseph was second in command of all Egypt, God works through him to help both Jews and Gentiles! “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*”

The most powerful things God works through to not only make us His *“treasured possession”* but to keep us as His *“treasured possession”*—His *“pearl of great value”*—is His Word and Sacraments, which means that they are among our greatest treasures. Once God gives us faith through the treasures of His Word and Holy Baptism, He continues to keep us as His treasured people through the treasures of His Word and the Lord’s Supper.

These are considered to be God’s **hidden** treasures. They’re hidden because only we who believe in God’s Word and promises know, for example, that the unleavened bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, which the world can see, is also Christ’s body and blood; the same body and blood of Jesus that was sacrificed on the cross in payment for our sins and raised to eternal life for the assurance of our forgiveness and eternal life. These things can only be seen by eyes of faith. That’s one of the reasons we’re here today and unbelievers are not.

We are also the hidden treasures of God, children of God who are hidden to the unbelieving world. But God doesn’t want us to stay hidden. Instead He wants us to publicly confess our faith through what we say and do. Jesus said, *“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven”* (Mt 10:32-33).

Kip and Brandy publicly confessed their Christian faith last week during the rite of Confirmation, and all of us are doing the same by being here today and proclaiming our faith in God’s Word through the liturgy and hymns, etc. This is one of the ways we let the world know the difference Christ has made in our lives. What He is here today to give us is infinitely more important than anything the world could give us.

God willing, others will see that difference in our lives also in how we treat one another. And through our good witness God works to turn them around like He turned us around from rejection to repentance and faith.

Confessing our faith in God’s Word is what Jesus was talking about at the end of our Gospel reading. He said that we who have *“been trained for the kingdom of heaven,”* or instructed in the Word of God and now believe in His love and salvation through Christ; we are *“like the master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and old.”* We share with others what God’s Word reveals to us from both the Old and New Testament, mainly His great mercy and love for all in Jesus Christ, through our words and actions.

All glory be to God the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children’s Sermon] Some of what I was saying in the sermon is that, while Jesus is our *“pearl of great value,”* we are God’s *“pearl of great value!”* When we were born through our parents, we were like this ordinary stone, not worth much to others in this world. But we were born again at the time of our Baptism, God covered us with Jesus, and made us like the pearls on this neckless. Not only do we become a son or daughter of God, but we also became brothers or sisters of each other and all who believe in Jesus as their Savior.

When will we see our eternal pearl-like bodies, free from sickness and death and united forever in paradise with the whole family of God? [In paradise.] For the rest of this life, we still look like this stone, even though, because of our Baptism and faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are children of God” (as it’s engraved on this stone which says “I am a child of God.”).

How do you let people know that you are a child of God, if you look like all the other people in this world who are not yet children of God? [By what we do and say, especially when we work together with our brothers and sisters in Christ to tell others about Jesus’ death on a cross to pay for our sins, and His resurrection from the dead in victory over our sins, death and the devil.] God works through this Good News to give them faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.