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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Proper 12, Series A (Pentecost 8)  
Saturday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Sunday, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Sermon: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

**Text: Matthew 13:44**

Focus: Jesus loves lost sinners more than anything else in the world.

Function: That they would rejoice in God's love for sinners like them.

Structure: Multiple Stories

Locus: "I believe that Jesus Christ...redeemed me...not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death... that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom..." (SC, Second Article of the Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen. Ten years ago a wealthy art dealer named Forrest Fenn hid a treasure chest full of gold coins and gems somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. The total value of the loot was about one million dollars. Mr. Fenn then publicly challenged the world to find his buried treasure, hoping that in their search they would also discover the beauty of the Rocky Mountain West.<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of treasure hunters answered the call and took to the hills in search of the hidden treasure. But the location was remote and dangerous. Many people were injured, and a few even died in the attempt, including a pastor from Grand Junction. They ranged from Yellowstone to New Mexico in search of fame and fortune. But not earlier this summer did someone finally uncover the treasure, confirming the find with a photograph sent to Mr. Fenn. At last the search is over! The treasure has been found. Much blood, sweat, and tears were expended in this expedition. What a price! But oh, what a prize!

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/08/forrest-fenn-treasure-found-1-m-treasure-found-rocky-mountains/5317286002/?fbclid=IwAR0XWIMol7NSdgujj-seR8a\\_rYb0nXyXvlpuQEnWUSbBvM5KB-flhT7AzMg](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/06/08/forrest-fenn-treasure-found-1-m-treasure-found-rocky-mountains/5317286002/?fbclid=IwAR0XWIMol7NSdgujj-seR8a_rYb0nXyXvlpuQEnWUSbBvM5KB-flhT7AzMg)

In preparing today's message, I found many articles about hidden treasures found in unusual places. Apparently, in the younger years of our Republic, especially after the Great Depression, many people distrusted banks and buried their gold and silver coins in coffee cans in their backyards or hid them between the studs in the walls of their homes. Several years ago, a family in the State of Washington found a horde of coins in the crawl space beneath their house worth about \$250,000.<sup>2</sup> A California couple out walking their dog stumbled upon several rusty cans sticking out of the ground. Instead of ignoring them, they took a peek, only to find that the cans contained well over \$10 million worth of gold coins.

Stories like these excite us and stir our imaginations, inspiring us to hope that any ordinary Joe or Jane could find buried treasure in the most unexpected places. Gold fever fed the American dream and spurred many Easterners to settle the West after gold finds in California, Colorado, and Alaska. And some of the most enjoyable movies and video games focus on the thrill of the treasure hunt, including the *Indiana Jones* movies, *Goonies*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Uncharted*.

Do you remember Indy's famous line to the man who found the cross of Coronado? "It belongs in a museum."

"So do you!" came the curt reply.

As for me, I think it belongs in my bank account!

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells us a succinct story about hidden treasure in just one verse:

**"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44, ESV).<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://komonews.com/sponsored/sell-gold/gold-coins-and-silver-coins-found-buried-under-a-house>

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

What a delightful story! Imagine the joy of the man who found the hidden treasure. He probably had a hard time containing his excitement as he went to the landowner with an offer to buy the field. It cost him a pretty penny—he first had to sell everything else that he owned, including his house, his business, and his car. Clearly, the seller didn't recognize the treasure beneath his feet, or he never would have sold. But once they signed the papers at the closing, I bet the first thing the buyer did was hurry to retrieve that wonderful prize. If it happened today, the story would definitely find its way into the TV news.

But what does this story mean? What is the secret or surprise to the parable?

For most of the past 2,000 years, the Church has interpreted the parable in this way: the hidden treasure represents the kingdom of God—or even Christ himself. This interpretation is quite appealing because it means that the Lord Jesus is the most precious person or thing we can ever have in our lives. The land purchase price represents the cost of discipleship—that is, the sacrifice that we must be willing to make in order to follow Christ. Consider what Jesus said in our Gospel lesson earlier this summer: “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38). As Christians, we must be willing to endure rejection, scorn, mockery, and even persecution in order to pursue Jesus through our life. No amount of struggle or sacrifice is too much to be paid for eternal life.

But here's the trouble with this traditional interpretation: it's extremely legalistic and law-oriented. It implies that in our attempt to enter the kingdom of God, we must *do* something to be saved. In the parable, the man had to sell everything he had and buy the field. But you can't *buy* your way into heaven! As Jeff Gibbs points out, the only person Jesus ever ironically told to sell everything he owned in order to become a disciple—the rich man of Matthew 19—was *unable* to do precisely that. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by good

works. If salvation is up to us, then we are all hopelessly, helplessly lost, and then why did Jesus die on the cross? So this parable can't be about the cost of discipleship. It has to be about a treasure even more costly.

Here's the answer (and surprise): *you* are the buried treasure. Perhaps that sounds shocking, especially when you consider how all of us are sinners who daily break God's commandments. From a spiritual perspective, we look more like an old, rusty coffee can than a pile of shiny, gold coins. Martin Luther once wrote that "the love of God does not find its object in man but must create it," which is a fancy way to say that God doesn't love us because we are lovely, but rather his love makes us lovely. In other words, we're not much to look at. This gives whole new meaning to the aphorism that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Of a certain ugly person, we might say that he or she has a face that "only a mother could love." Well, we have a heart that only *Jesus* could love.

Some of you may have grown up with parents or teachers who routinely said rotten things to you: "You're a mistake!" or "You're never going to amount to anything." Evolutionists preach a similar message, maintaining that all life, including human life, is a statistical anomaly and accident of chance. We're nothing more than cosmic dust. What are the philosophical implications of evolutionary biology? Simply that we are all an accident and that our lives have no inherent meaning, value, or purpose.

But not to Jesus! In the eyes of Jesus, you are like a hidden treasure or costly pearl. In the eyes of Jesus, you are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). In the eyes of Jesus, you are so beautiful that you are worth dying for. In fact, every single lost sinner on the face of the planet is precious to Jesus. As we read in our Old Testament lesson today: "For 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...” (Deut. 7:6a). And he will pay any price to make you his own. In fact, he already paid the ultimate price when he died on the cross to save us from our sins. “You were ransomed..., not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19). We could never earn, win, buy, or steal our own salvation, so Jesus won it for us when he bought you with his blood. He bought the farm so that you would belong to him. “For you were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Now you belong to Jesus forever. At last the search is over! The treasure has been found. Jesus expended much blood, sweat, and tears—his dying breath—in this expedition. What a price! But oh, what a prize! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.