

Mt. Carmel UMC

July 23, 2023

“Kingdom of Heaven 2” - Matthew 13:44-46 – Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

Jesus is saying here that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure to be found or like a priceless pearl to be sought. Each person saw the treasure and just had to have it. Have you had that feeling? What is the greatest treasure you possess? As I packed and unpacked my boxes when I moved a couple weeks ago, I literally touched everything that I own. Though I have downsized over the years since my retirement, I am amazed at what all people treasure and store up in their closets, attics, basements, and even rental storage units! What’s in your treasure chest? Do you even know?

The Antiques Roadshow has been one of the most watched shows on public television. Millions of folks would tune in week after week to watch people just like you and me discover that the bowl Aunt Bessie gave them for their wedding or the picture, they bought at a flea market, is a treasure worth a lot of money. What gives the show its drama, aside from the hope that we will see something we possess being appraised for thousands of dollars, is that many of the people featured do not fully recognize the value of what they have. To them it is just a piece of the scenery or another interesting oddity collecting dust. Having seen it around the house for years or having paid little or nothing for it, they don't realize its true value. Now here is where it fits with our message today - I wonder if the same can be said about us, and the faith we possess? Do we realize the value of the kingdom of heaven?

The story is told of King Midas who loved the sight and sound and the feel of gold. The king was convinced that enough gold would bring meaning to his life and was delighted when he was granted his wish that everything he touched would be changed into gold. Yet his golden world came to have a hollow ring to it. He discovered he could no longer eat because his food would turn to gold as it touched his lips. He couldn't embrace his daughter because he turned her into gold. As long as he had the Midas touch, he had desired to make him rich, the poor king could no longer have life or love.

But what about you? What do you ultimately treasure? Life, or kingdom of heaven life, or maybe eternal life? Stop and really think about it. Jesus gave his life for us. For Jesus, we are more precious than his own life! He gave his life that we might have kingdom of heaven life. It is that valuable! For the kingdom of heaven what are you willing to give up? The pearl merchant gave up, or sold, all he had in order to purchase the one pearl of great price.

It reminds me of another old story, once upon a time, a monk found a precious jewel. A short time later, the monk met a traveler, who was hungry and asked the monk if he would share some of his food. When the monk opened his bag, the traveler saw the gem and, on an impulse, asked the monk if he could have it. Amazingly, the monk gave the traveler the precious stone. The traveler departed quickly overjoyed with his new possession. However, a few days later, he came back and returned the stone to the monk and then made this request: “Please give me what it is you have that enabled you to give me this precious gem!” One of the churches I served had a vision statement that said that they were, “*a community of faith that gives itself away.*” I just wonder; do we have the faith to give that way...and to live that way here? That’s kingdom of heaven living!

In the final verse today, Jesus reminds us that there are new and old treasures. “*Therefore, every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.*” (Matthew 13:52) What treasures do we have – new and old? Don’t we treasure both new friends and old friends? What are your new favorite songs and golden oldies? Jesus called his disciples and us to treasure both the old and the new. Many of the religious authorities of his day only valued the old – the Law and the Prophets. You might say, they valued the Good Olds, but Jesus brought the Good News! And they did not care much for it...or for him! This fall we will be welcoming new members into the community of faith, and though some of us feel like we have been here forever, we were all new members at some time. Let’s renew our vows with them and commit to living into this earthly expression of the kingdom of heaven here.

Let me close with one of the oldest treasures in my pastor's tool kit. I received this from a college friend my freshman year at Penn State fifty years ago. It was a poem he found in a greeting card attributed to an unknown soldier of the confederacy:

I asked God for strength that I might achieve;
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I had asked for,
but everything that I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered;
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

What is it you desire most? May it be God and entering into God's kingdom. May you too, be so richly blessed. Alleluia and Amen.

What Is Your Most Precious Treasure

Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs 7/20/23

What is your most precious treasure?
What to you has great value?
How does eternal life measure,
When compared to that for you?

Buried treasure in a field,
For one it was that one thing.
To buy it and have the deal sealed,
He went and sold everything.

How about the merchant of pearls,
Who found the most precious one?
On seeing that one his head whirls.
He had to have it, bar none.

Today take the time to reflect,
On what's most precious to you.
Search your soul, and I do suspect,
You'll do what you need to do.

Going about the coming days,
Go and figure this all out.
Then change your life and change your ways,
Heaven's what it's all about.