

First Presbyterian Church  
Cheyenne, Wyoming  
July 24, 2011  
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Hidden Treasure Found,  
Psalm 128, Romans 8: 28-39, Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

“In his book, Disciple, Juan Carlos Ortiz describes the cost of becoming a Christian. He envisions a scene where **we-all of us here**-are trying to buy a beautiful pearl. Holly will play the part of a Pearl seller, and I will play the part of each of us here as the buyer.

“So we say. ‘I want this pearl. How much is it?’

**‘Everything you have,’ says the seller.**

We make up our minds. ‘All right, I’ll buy it,’ we say.

**‘Well. What do you have?’ ‘Let’s write it down.’**

‘Well, I have \$10,000 in the bank.’

**‘Good--\$10,000. What else?’**

‘That’s all. That’s all I have.’

**‘Nothing more?’**

‘Well, I have a few dollars here in my pocket.’

**‘How much?’**

We start digging. ‘Well, let’s see....\$120.’

**‘That’s fine. What else do you have?’**

‘Well, nothing. That’s all.’

**‘Where do you live?’**

‘In my house. Yes, I have a house.’

**‘The house, too, then.’ (The seller writes this down.)**

You mean I have to live in my camper?’

**‘You have a camper? That too. What else?’**

‘I’ll have to sleep in my car!’

**‘You have a car?’**

‘Two of them.’ ‘Both become mine, both cars.’

**‘What else?’**

I have nothing left! I am alone now.’

**Suddenly the seller exclaims, ‘Oh, I almost forgot! You, yourself, too!’ But then the seller adds, ‘I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don’t forget that they are mine, just as you are. And, whenever I need any of them, you must give them up, because I am now the owner.’”** “Emphasis”, July/August, 2002. pg. 33.

How shall we respond to this, other than with our mouths agape and in stunned silence? As we gather our senses again, we remember Jesus’ Kingdom of Heaven parables of treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. In both situations, the main characters in the parables could well be you and me. Of course, the just shared dialogue is about us. All three stories raise questions: What do we want so badly that we would sell everything we have in order to own it? Have we done this in some manner with our lives and goods already? The bigger question Jesus raises is: Would

we sell or give away all we have and all we are to God in order to be part of God's kingdom? This is what it means to confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is the price Jesus paid to be our Lord and Savior. Throughout the Bible God tells us that he will loan us our material goods and our lives to use for his glory, but in the end the goods and we belong to him. Even the land we bought that contains the treasure, or the pearl of great price we have purchased ultimately belong to God, the seller. They and we are all his. This price tag for entering God's kingdom may be shocking to us.

To some people this looks like a scam. We could look at this Kingdom of Heaven proposition like the pessimistic kid who is put in a room by himself filled with gifts of anything and everything he wants? After opening all of them, he rants, "I'll bet the kid in the room next to me has better stuff. I have been scammed."

Or, we can look at it like the positive kid in the next room who stands alone waste deep in manure enthusiastically shoveling away while proclaiming at the top of his happy voice, "You can't fool me, where there is manure, there is a pony." With God, there is always more to the Kingdom of heaven than meets the eye or comes with the listed price.

I like this second kid's attitude, and that of the Psalmist in today's Psalm 128. "Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in God's ways." This positive proclamation is the result of a person who has found that there are many hidden treasures to be found in surrendering all one has and is to the Lord, in being owned by the Lord, and living as the Lord has commanded us to do. "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you." Your family will be like a fruitful vine and olive shoots within your house; you may see prosperity all the days of your life, you may see your children's children, and peace will be upon your nation. Our world surely could use this today.

Paul proclaimed this attitude, relationship, and hidden treasure found even more strongly in Romans. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Paul adds that God has sent his Son to be the firstborn within a large family, and predestined or called us to be part of his family. In Jesus, God forgave our sins and made us right with him, again so that we might live as Jesus did. God would then brag about us to the world like a proud father. Like a jeweler displaying his wares, God proclaims, "Look at what treasures I have provided beforehand for you in my kingdom: I have called you by name: Cleansed you of your sins: And have lifted you up into my arms, into a loving, caring relationship with me to be my child forever!"

In all this treasure, God is declaring that there is a "kingdom welcome awaiting" us. In the parable of the tiny little mustard seed becoming a great bush or tree, Jesus is telling us that the kingdom is a place like this. As a tree is a safe home for nesting birds, so is God's kingdom a dwelling place for those searching for security and community. As a congregation, we are to be an expression of the kingdom of heaven as we guide people to find, as we have, the treasures of God. We constantly need to be checking to make sure that we are providing a refuge for those who are seeking to belong to a healthy community and to God. There is a kingdom welcome awaiting us. Let us do the same for others.

There is also a pervasiveness to this kingdom. It covers all aspects of our lives. There is not room in the kingdom for compartmentalizing-either our lives, our service and/or our money. We cannot maintain integrity toward the kingdom of heaven, and decide that areas of our lives are beyond the kingdom's domain. We cannot use the awful excuse that the movie Mafia does and says, "It is nothing personal, just business" when we destroy another person's life or faith. Adolf Hitler tried to pull such deceit over the eyes of the German people in World War II when he declared that part of their hearts and minds belonged to the Third Reich. We cannot really separate politics, economics and religion, as if "God owns one and not the other. If we as a congregation are to live faithfully as part of the kingdom of heaven, then the values of God in Jesus Christ must encompass every part of our lives and actions." There is also a pervasiveness to this kingdom.

If the kingdom of heaven is to be made real and effective, then we must realize that all of our life, now owned by God, is under the influence of the Spirit's guidance. We cannot even claim ignorance, for Paul wrote, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." In the Spirit, God is always present within us at every level of our being.

There is also an omnipresence to this Kingdom in the world around us. Not only does the kingdom of heaven fully live in us, it also permeates our neighbors, and our societal structures. "Its location is not isolated to holy sites or worship spaces, but it is a hidden treasure to be discovered as one goes about one's daily routine. The kingdom of heaven is to be found as much in the marketplace as in the chapel; as much in the classroom as in the prayer closet; as much in the slums as in the ornate cathedral." If we as a congregation are open to hidden treasures of the kingdom, then we will discover it to be everywhere. There is an omnipresence to this Kingdom in the world around us.

If we truly seek the Kingdom of Heaven, there is a satisfying ending to the search. "Whether one's search is for the meaning of life, a loving acceptance of one's self, a forgiveness that closes the book on one's past, or a vehicle through which one can serve others, the kingdom of heaven is that which fulfills one's desire for completeness. For us to know this satisfying ending in every aspect of our lives, we must embrace the kingdom of heaven. "It is the pearl that brings one's search to an end." The satisfying ending found in seeking the Kingdom of Heaven is God in Jesus Christ. You knew this all along since he is far from being hidden, but certainly is the treasure who owns us and all we have. (Many ideas in this section are from "Emphasis", July/August, 2002, pg. 29)

However, there may be times in our lives when: Jesus, as the embodied kingdom of heaven seems to be hidden: When the positive mantra of the Psalmist, "Happy is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways," is not so happy: And when the encouraging words of Paul, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God," have little to do with our lives. We may desperately need them to do so, but they appear not to. Such times may be when we lose a loved one to death, to divorce, or to the living misery of a continued illness. It could be when

we lose our job, our children to drugs, or another terrorist attack makes us wonder if there is any hope of a God who is in control. You can fill in your own times of despair, feeling lost and alone. I know I have been there with you.

Yet, I say to you, these are the times when the supposedly hidden treasure is found by me again, or more appropriately re-revealed to me. It is when I am reminded of one of the scriptures that is a basis for the powerful poem, "Footprints in the Sand," and know that the Christ who owns me has been there all along. It is hard to put it any better than Paul did in Romans 8: 31-39 after he had suffered mightily for his faith and in his life. I will add one comment into these words as I share them again with you.

"If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Remember, God owns everything including us anyway.) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am 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."

My friends may this relationship to God in Jesus Christ be the pearl you sell everything for, the hidden treasure found or rediscovered, and the very public core of yours and my life.