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Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“God’s Treasures”

Text: Matthew 13:44-52 (Romans 8:28-30; 1 Kings 3:5-12)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price – or some version of them – can be found in every religion in the world. That is, if they are interpreted in the following way: that the Kingdom of Heaven should be of such great value to us that we should be willing to sell everything we have to obtain it. That is not a uniquely Christian teaching. Radical Islamists believe that – that is why they fly airplanes into buildings and keep blowing themselves up. Mormons believe that – that is why they give up years of their life to become missionaries and knock on doors. Buddhists believe that – that is why they sell all their possessions, don orange robes, and enter monasteries. Many people, of all kinds of philosophies and religions think that that by giving up everything – even their very lives – that they will then receive this greatest of all treasures. That they can *purchase* the Kingdom of Heaven.

But that is not true, and never has been true, and it is not what Jesus would have us learn and understand today. Not only because the Kingdom of Heaven is not for sale, but because even if it was, no matter what we do or give up, we will always fall short. Our dedication, our sincerity, our commitment, falls short. How often do we put the things and relationships and desires of this world ahead of God and His Kingdom? And even if we manage to do good things and have our priorities straight *for a while*, how long does it last? In the end, we always fall short. For no matter what we are able to do on the outside, our inside, our nature, is still sinful. And so we *know* the Kingdom of Heaven should be so valuable to us. We know that! Knowing that is not the problem. Doing it is the problem. And it’s not just that we *won’t* do it – it’s that no matter how hard we try, we *can’t* do it.

A rich young man (Mt 19:16-26) found that out one day when he came up to Jesus and asked, **“Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?”** Ultimately, Jesus gave Him the standard we’ve been talking about here so far: **“sell what you possess and give to the poor.”** Sell everything you have. If the Kingdom of Heaven is of such great value to you, then you should be willing to give up everything you have to obtain it. And then we read, **“When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful . . .”** That young man is just like us. And Jesus had to show him: He couldn’t do it. And after this, the disciples (who had been

listening) were astonished – and probably a little confused – and asked: “*Who then can be saved?*” And in Jesus’ reply, we have the key to understanding these two parables rightly: “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*”

And so the man in these parables who sells everything he has and buys his treasure is **not us**. And Jesus does not tell these parables to tell us it *should* be us! No, Jesus tells these parables to reveal to us that **the man is Him**. For it is the Son of God who gave up *everything* – coming down from His throne in Heaven to live for us as one of us. Putting Himself under the Law that He didn’t have to keep and living a life of perfection for us in our place, doing what we cannot do. And then in the end, laying down His own perfect life for us on the cross, in order to redeem us. And that word *redeem* is a buying word, a purchasing word – which means (to use the words of the Small Catechism) *to purchase us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but [with something far more valuable:] with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death*. And then the Small Catechism tells us why: ***that I may be His own*** . . .

And with that understanding of Jesus and His work, we see what it is that makes these parables uniquely *Christian* – that the doer is not us; it is God Himself. That we are not the finders, but the found. And that we are the treasure, hidden to this world but known by God, and considered so precious that He would not even withhold His only-begotten Son to have us for His own. . . . And in the midst of this world that often dumps on us and buries us under its cares and problems – that, Jesus wants you to know, is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It is a Kingdom of grace; of His finding You; of His going after and buying you; of His taking you to be His own!

And with *that* understanding, I thought the picture on the cover of the bulletin this week was perfect! (You might want to look at it.) For it shows not only a hidden treasure that had been dug up, but what does the shape of that treasure box look like? A casket! For that’s us spiritually – born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), not having *anything* to do or give up for God! . . . And while we were still dead in our trespasses and sins, unable to find Christ and His Kingdom – **Christ found us**. And finding us He was not content to leave us there, dead; He purchased us with all that He had, by the payment of His death, joining us in the grave. So that when He rose, *we would be raised with Him*, that we would be a treasure no longer dead and buried in the ground, but a treasure now alive and born again. That, as we heard in Romans, “***He might be the firstborn among many brothers.***” . . . And this happened for you and me when we were baptized. We were raised from the dead in those waters, and given the Spirit of life, that we might live a new life. A new life, no longer for *sin*, but now in Him. . . . And in the midst of a world of selfishness and death – that, Jesus wants you to know, is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It is a Kingdom of resurrection; of life and not death; that we who were dead might live again.

Now, many people in this world have trouble believing this – this interpretation of these parables – because they don't consider themselves worth that much. Maybe because of something they thought, or said, or did. And maybe you are one of those people. But isn't it nice to know that God *does* consider you worth that much – so valuable that He would trade the life of His Son for you! And I daresay that His opinion matters more than yours or mine, and that His opinion is more than just opinion – it is the truth! And so you are not what you think of yourself, but what He says you are: a sinner, yes; but in Christ, even more: His child, His treasure.

And though You may not look like a treasure now, and may look like all the other fish in the sea – Jesus knows His own. Jesus knows the good fish and the bad fish, the next parable He tells here. And what separates the good fish and the bad fish is not who does good and who does bad – it is faith. The good fish are those who know and believe that Jesus gave up everything for them, and forgives them their sins, and that He has purchased us and that we are His own. And the bad fish are those who do not believe God and His Word, but try to purchase Him and His Kingdom as *their* own. All the fish are caught because Jesus died for all people, but only those who by faith receive forgiveness and life **as a gift from God** will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who try to do it themselves, to earn or purchase it by their own works, will not.

And so for the Christian, for you and me, all depends on Christ. His coming, His life, His work, His finding, His purchasing, His forgiving, His love, His death and resurrection, His body and blood. With these we have everything. With these we are safe and secure. With these we have His Word and can rely on His promise, that He who has given us our faith, purchased us and made us His own, will see us through to the end, and take us into His Kingdom. (Rom 8:28-20) If it depends on Him then we can be sure. If it depends on us, then we will be lost.

And that difference is critical – not just for your faith, but for your *life*. For only when you know that you have been purchased by Christ and belong to Him; that you – by grace through faith – have been given His Kingdom and are safe and secure; only then can you live in this world as the treasure you are, and as God would have you be. For if you are constantly having to do something for God and earn your way into Heaven, then your whole life will be one of serving yourself to save yourself. But if you have already been saved by your Saviour, born again, forgiven, and set free from the burdens of the Law, *then now you can live!* Not for yourself, but for others. For you have already been given everything – the Kingdom of Heaven is yours! Now you can live as Christ lived; as a son of God. A treasure no longer dead and buried, but alive and glorious. A pearl no longer hidden, but reflecting the radiance of your Saviour.

***“Have you understood all these things?”*** Jesus asked His disciples. They answered yes.

My prayer is that you too would understand, all that Christ has done for you. That you would pray, as Solomon prayed, not for the wealth and riches of this world, but for a right understanding of the true wealth and riches that you have already been given, in Christ. The wealth and riches of a Kingdom that will never end. To know and understand the treasure that you are, and the joy of your salvation. For then come what may in this world and in your life, this joy cannot be taken from you. For you belong not to this world, but to the One who purchased you, bled for you, cares for you, and feeds you here with His own body and blood.

Yes, you are worth that much! Not because I said so, but because the cross says so. Now go and be and live as the treasure you are!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.