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“Me? A Treasure? Yes You Are!”  
Text: Matthew 13:44-52 (Romans 8:28-39)

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

Today we heard two of my favorite parables of Jesus. Parables that I do not think we can ever hear enough. Parables that teach how valuable you are, how much you are worth to your Saviour. That you are His treasure, you are His prized pearl, for whom He gave everything.

We can never hear that enough, because if there's one thing, one truth, satan does not want you to *hear*, it's that one. If there's one thing, one truth, satan does not want you to *believe*, it's that's one.

And so he is fighting. Against you, against the church. To get you to disbelieve or doubt your Father's love for you. And so, he says: A loving God? A God who treasures you? Really? Take a look around. The world is a mess. The Church is a mess. You are a mess. Look at what happened in the world just this past week. Look at the continuing divisions and scandals in the Church. Look at yourself! You're no treasure! You're a dirty, rotten sinner.

And he's right, you know. There is always a kernel of truth to satan's lies, which is what makes them so effective. The world, the Church, and yes, you, are a mess. And satan's working very hard to keep it all that way, sowing his weeds - as we heard last week - not only of hatred and division, but also of pride and glory, to keep us in sin, to keep us selfish, to keep us a mess.

And then in addition, he says, you have to fix this mess you've created. He is not content with messing things up, he also wants us to keep chasing our tails to try to fix it. Because we're not very good at that. The world that preaches tolerance as the way to peace just keeps getting more intolerant and unpeaceful. The Church that preaches compromise as the way to unity is just compromising itself into irrelevance. And ourselves? You know the answer to that. Like New Year's resolutions, we might do good for a couple of weeks, and then we fall again. Pull one weed and another pops up in its place.

And he even uses Jesus' own parable against us. This parable, which Jesus meant to comfort us and reassure us, satan turns on its head and says: You are the man in the parable. Or at least you're supposed to be. God and His kingdom are supposed to be this precious and valuable to you. And you say they are, Christian. But you don't act like it. You are willing to give up everything, are you? I know better. I know your heart. You'd

rather deny, you'd rather compromise, you'd rather keep quiet than lose your job, lose face, or lose your precious things. And I don't even need to try very hard to get you to fall! You're so weak and pathetic. A little name calling, a little pressure, and you crumble like a stale old cookie. So treasure? You're no treasure! You're an old, obsolete, broken down piece of junk that God is burying not in love, but in a landfill.

But here's the thing satan: If you want to talk about burying and you want to talk about a landfill, well what about Jesus? You see, He was crucified on a garbage heap, yes, thrown out like the garbage by an ungrateful world, and then buried, dead, in the ground. *That's all true.*

But satan: *why was he there?* Why was the Son of God there at all? Was it not because He loved us? Was it not because He was giving up everything **for us**?

He came down from heaven and was incarnated as a man. He willingly gave up His prerogatives as God, willingly not using His divine power to help Himself or save Himself. He left his throne in heaven and the unending song of the angels to be born in a stable. He became obedient to His parents, lived in this fallen creation, and He who feeds all knew hunger, He who provides rain for all thirsted, and He who is joy sorrowed. You tempted Him satan, but He didn't fall for it, did He? He knew rejection, even in His hometown, even by His "family" - His family and friends. And then He allowed Himself to be arrest and beaten and whipped and spit on and punched. His head was crowned with thorns and He experienced the utter rejection of the cross - yes, thrown out and buried like garbage.

And you call Him weak, satan. But isn't that strength to do all that? And you call Him a failure, satan. For having such indignity done to Him. But why, then, is His grave empty? Why, then, is there still a Church - as imperfect as it may be? And why, satan, are you still fighting so hard if you've won? *Where is your victory?* . . . Unless you haven't really won at all! Unless all you can do is mess things up and try to make us believe you won.

Yes! It's true isn't it, satan? We are God's treasures. If we look at ourselves, as you want us to, we'll never see that. But if we look at the cross, and all that Jesus gave for us, then that's how much I'm worth! Then there's what cleans up my mess. There's my forgiveness, my life, my salvation, my food. There's the answer. We confess it every week in the Creed, those words that mean that Jesus *purchased and won us from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death* (Small Catechism, explanation of the Second Article). Purchased! I belong to Him. And dear friends, *so do you.*

Because Jesus took that holy precious blood poured out on the cross and poured it over you in Holy Baptism, to cleanse you and make you His.

And He takes that Body and Blood that hung on the cross and was buried in the grave but now risen from the dead and puts it into you, into your mouth, feeding you with Himself and His life and His victory.

And He takes the Word of His cross, that message of how valuable you are to Him and all that He gave to purchase you, and fills your ears with it. That you may know, and by the working of His Spirit, believe it.

Because it's hard to believe it sometimes. When we've had a particularly bad week. When our own sins have erupted from us and the sins of others have crushed us. When we look in us and around us and see nothing but dirt.

But in the dirt is where Jesus is! When He came down to earth, He was born in a dirty stable, not an immaculate palace. He hung out with dirty sinners, not the high and mighty and those who thought themselves deserving.

And so as He was hidden, so now He hides us in the ground, in the dirt. But don't be dismayed by that. It is, as St. Paul said, good. First of all because once we get a taste of glory, we always want more. That's the way of our sinful nature. Get a little, want a lot. So Jesus buries us, His treasures, under the sufferings and pains and trials of this world - not because He hates us, but because He loves us. To keep us with Him and relying on Him, and hungering and thirsting after Him and His glory, not the glory of this world and life.

And secondly, He hides us in the ground, in the dirt, that we may be a blessing to others in the dirt, those with us under the suffering and pains and trials of this world and life. That they not be alone. That they may see and hear the love of their Saviour from us - that they, too, are pearls of great price their Saviour is searching for.

He hides us in the ground for hiddenness is the way of it with God. In the end, on the Last Day, all will be revealed. The net will be hauled ashore and the fish separated - the righteous and the evil. Those in Christ and those who are not. But not until then. Now we live by faith and not sight. Now we live by His Word and promises. Now we receive Him hidden in water and words and bread and wine. Now we live in the dirt, but knowing that the resurrection to eternal life is coming. For He who was raised from the dirt and dust of death, is coming back to do the same for us. And then will be the kingdom, the power, and glory.

Yet not that even then you will see the treasure that you are. For then you won't care about that. You will only see your Saviour and the treasure that He is.

And so until then, we confess with St. Paul: *No, in all these things* - in all this dirty world and life - *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure 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.* From our Saviour who came into the dirt for us, to raise us to Him in His glory.

So it is as we sang just before the sermon: *I am baptized into Christ* (LSB #594). Into His death and resurrection. And so sin, satan, and death have all lost. And there is nothing worth comparing to this comfort sure. We don't even have to fear the grave - we're already buried, with Christ. Treasures, pearls of great price, resting and sleeping secure, awaiting the day of our raising. Children of paradise, being kept by our Saviour.

*That's who you are.* And if you are still doubting it, come and receive the Body and Blood of the One who says you are. Yes, you are worth it - every crumb, every drop, every splash, every Word. Yes, you are worth it, so He is here for you - His treasure, His child.

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