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Pentecost 9

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Hidden Treasures”

Text: Matthew 13:44-52; Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Romans 8:28-39

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

I spent this past week with 700 or so buried treasures. 700 or so pearls of great value. That’s what the Lord calls them. The world calls them Mary, Randy, Caden, Justin, Paige. Joanna, Caleb, Eli. But the Lord calls them His. His children. His treasures. His pearls. As He calls you.

But they don’t look like treasures! Not by the world’s standards. In the parable we heard from Jesus today, didn’t you ever wonder . . . why was that treasure there in the first place? How many people over the years walked right over that buried treasure without even knowing it? Or, how many farmers plowed that field and left it? Or, how many, perhaps, found that . . . *thing*, saw it, but put it back - thinking it just a worthless piece of junk? Until a certain man saw it. Who saw *a treasure*. Long buried, long ignored, long thought junk. But not to Him! So He bought that field. Gave all He had for it.

The same with the merchant in search of fine pearls. How many saw that one pearl and just kept right on looking? Threw it in with the others? Nothing special to see here. Until our man saw it. Who saw what no one else could see. A pearl of great value. That He had to have. So He gave all He had for it.

But what do we see? When we look around in the world? When we look at others? When we look in the mirror? Or when others look at you? We see people buried. Buried in sin. Sometimes a *mountain* of sin! Buried by troubles and problems, covered with dirt. Folks overlooked by others; nothing special here, nothing to see here. People we wouldn’t even take *for free*, let alone sell all we have for them and purchase them. People we drive right past, thinking them worthless, not worth my time or attention. And you’ve been treated that way by others; I know you have. So have I. And *worse* . . . by those who not only won’t give anything to you or for you, but want to take from you by hook or by crook. Bury you even farther. Out of sight, out of mind.

But then our man comes along. And He does something no one else would do. He does what everyone else thinks *foolish and stupid*, in fact! He buys that piece of junk. He buys that pearl. Because they’re treasures to Him. He sees what no one else can see. But He doesn’t just buy them, as extraordinary as that is. He goes even farther - He gives all He

has for them. Everything. For you, that would be to sell your house, empty your bank account, pawn your possessions, and go to the purchase with nothing but the clothes on your back - or maybe not even with those! And you hand it all over. Every penny.

Joyfully. **To buy something everyone else thinks is junk!**

If that makes no sense to you, you are beginning to understand! To understand how differently God sees things, how differently God values things. How vast and unimaginable His mercy and love. Maybe no one else in this world thinks you're worth anything at all, *even you!* Won't even give you the time of day. And yet the Son of God, our Saviour, Jesus, looks at you and gives all He has for you, His treasure and pearl. And He really did give all. He even gave the clothes off His back, poured out his Blood, and gave His life. *Joyfully!* **For He could not imagine life without you.**

And if that makes no sense to you, you are beginning to understand that we cannot understand such love. And yet, it's true.

Already in the Old Testament we hear of this. As we heard in the reading from Deuteronomy, God calls Israel *His treasured possession*. And trust me, *no one else* considered Israel that way! Israel - the children of Jacob, that is - weren't royalty, weren't rich, weren't even particularly good people! Jacob was a heel and a con man. His sons sold one of their brothers into slavery. One of Jacob's sons committed adultery with one of his wives! They were slaves in Egypt. And after God brought them out of Egypt and out of their slavery, dividing the Red Sea and defeating the Egyptians for them, all they did was grumble and complain. By all and every worldly standard, they were most certainly not treasures or pearls! **And yet they were to God.**

And you - *who are you?* What have you done? How have you lived? My guess: not so different than Jacob and his family. And those 700 or so I spent this past week with? The same. And this guy in the pulpit? Yeah. And yet your Saviour, the very Son of God Himself, Jesus, came down from heaven and gave everything He had for you on the cross. And He's still coming for you. Here is His forgiveness, for you. Here is His Word, for you. Here is His life, for you. Here is His Body and Blood, for you. *That I, that you, may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom* (Small Catechism). Not only that we rejoice, but to do so gives Him joy as well!

And purchased by Him and with His gifts, treated and regarded as treasures and pearls, that changes us. It changes how we look at others. That the mercy and love of Jesus that enables Him to look at us like that, now with that same mercy and love given to us and living in us, we begin to see others the same way. As people worth our time and attention. As people worth giving ourselves for. As people we don't want to live without. Imagine if everyone actually did that. This would be a pretty awesome world to live in, don't you think?

For now, though, those treasures remain hidden. The net of the Gospel *gathers fish of every kind*, as Jesus said. We can't tell the difference. But our Father in heaven knows, and at the end of the age the separation will take place. But until then, as Jesus died for one and all, lives for one and all, and gives to one and all, so will we. *Joyfully*. Not because we have to, but because Jesus lives in us. Because we cannot do otherwise. Because as St. Paul said, in Jesus, *we are more than conquerors*. We are His sons and daughters.

Have you understood all these things? Jesus asked His disciples. Not just regarding these parables we heard today, but also the ones we heard the past two weeks: the Parable of the Sower and the miraculous harvest the seed of God's Word produces despite hard hearts, rocky hearts, satanic birds, and the heat of persecution that try to prevent it from growing in us. It still does. **There is still a harvest.** And the Parable of the Weeds and the miraculous harvest the seed of God's Word produces despite the bad seed - the non-truths, half-truths, and lies Satan is sowing in the world. **There is still a harvest.** Jesus is going to send out His twelve to sow that seed, preach the Word. And He would do the rest. And then the parables we heard today. Do you think they understood all these things?

And how about you? ***Have you understood all these things?*** You do, and you don't. You **do**, and that's why you're here. You are here to receive His gifts - the gifts Christ gives to you and for you to be His treasure. But you also **don't**, for you understand that you cannot understand such love of a perfect, holy God for us wretched sinners. That the *Lord of Glory bought us with His lifeblood as the price* (LSB #851 v. 1). It shouldn't be! And yet it is. *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways* (Gradual)! And not just *unsearchable and inscrutable*, but wondrous and amazing.

That's what 700 or so buried treasures and pearls of great value and I rejoiced in this past week, including a number of our youth. That our Lord dug us up out of the grave our sins put us in, washed us off in the waters of Holy Baptism, continues to care for us with His words of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and feeds us with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament. We heard it, rejoiced in it, sang it, and lived in it all week. And that joy now continues here with all of you, even when the devil, the world, and our sinful nature heap dirt and stones upon us and try to bury us again. Trying to convince us that we're no treasures, no pearls of great value - it's all a myth, a fairy tale, wishful thinking. *Except it's not!* Because they once did that to Jesus - rejected Him, killed Him, and buried Him. **But He rose.** And a grave that is **empty** means hearts that are **full**. Full of Jesus. And so full of life and hope. So that when you are buried in a field - *literally* buried under six feet of dirt, stone cold dead because of your sin, with just a stone with your name etched on it marking the spot where they buried you, folks remembering you for a while, but then generations to come, people walking by and asking, *who was that?* And the answer is: *ah, nobody. Just another dead body.* Jesus, who bought, or redeemed, the dirt of that field, in

fact, the dirt of this whole planet with His own blood, **will dig you up and raise you to life again.** Because when you ask Him: *who is that?* His answer is: ah, yes! *My treasure!*

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.