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Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Alexandria, VA

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“A Sure and Certain Hope”

Text: Matthew 13:44-52 (Romans 8:28-30)

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

For the past two weeks, in our examination of Jesus’ parables in Matthew chapter 13, we considered the message of Jesus that as long as the Church is in the world, God’s Word and God’s people will come under attack. And with these parables we have again been reminded that as long as the Church is in the world, she will be the Church **Militant** – a Church not at peace and rest, but a Church in constant battle against the Enemy, who is seeking always to destroy God’s Word and God’s people and God’s Church in whatever ways and by whatever means possible. . . . And at times this battle can seem more than we can bear. At times it seems as if the Enemy is winning. And as we get worn down by the battle and the constant and relentless attacks, even the *strongest* of Christians can be reduced to wonder, “*What hope do we then have?*” And with that question in mind, we turn to the last of the parables that Jesus tells His disciples here in this chapter, to strengthen our faith and show us once again our hope.

And so first Jesus tells two similar parables, often called the Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value. In both parables, a man finds something that He considers of greater worth than anything else in this world, and sells “***all that he has***” to buy these things. . . . Now, unlike the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds, Jesus does not supply an explanation of these two parables, instead simply asking His disciples, “***Have you understood all these things?***” And while they answer “**yes**” . . . you have to wonder! Did they really? . . . Do we? . . . Because most often these parables are interpreted as Law – that the Kingdom of Heaven should be of such value to you that you sell – or be willing to sell – “*all that you have*” to get it. But is that really the point that Jesus is making here? If so, then not only do we live and struggle in the Church Militant, but we have also all miserably failed in our devotion to God’s Kingdom as well. For we must admit that there are many times when God’s Kingdom is not first in our hearts and minds. We must admit that there are many things and people that often occupy our hearts and minds in place of God and His kingdom. And if Jesus’ final message in this set of parables is about what our devotion *should* be like, then we had all better “buck up” and do a better job of fighting in the Kingdom and putting God first! . . . But, don’t we already know that? Isn’t that the First Commandment? Whose explanation is that “*We should fear,*

*love, and trust in God above all things.*” Is Jesus *really* telling these parables to motivate us to be better Christians?

Well, the answer is no! For just as in the first two parables, there is in this Holy Gospel for today good news and hope. For today we have heard not what we are supposed to do – we have heard what *Jesus* has done for us. We have heard of our hope. For Jesus is the man who found a treasure and a pearl of such great value that He was not only willing, but in fact, did give up everything He had to make this treasure become His own. He came down from Heaven and was incarnate as a man. He gave up His prerogatives as God, willingly not using His divine power. He left His throne room and the unending songs of the angels to be born in a stable. He became obedient to His parents, and lived in the creation He Himself had made. He knew hunger and thirst and sorrow. He was subjected to temptation. He knew rejection, even in His hometown, even by His own. The all-powerful One allowed Himself to be arrested and man-handled – whipped and spit on and punched. He did not fight back as His hands and feet were nailed to the cross. His head was crowned in thorns. He experienced the complete and utter rejection of God, and then tasted death and the grave. He exchanged His perfection for our sin, His place for our place, His life for our death. Or in other words, there is nothing that He did not give up. He truly and fully gave up everything for His treasure. With single-minded devotion and steadfast purpose, with a heart and love we cannot completely understand, Jesus bought His treasure and pearl. Paid for in full “*not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.*” . . . And so you belong to Him!

That’s right! You are not the man in these parables, you are the treasure! You are what the Son of God considered to be of such great value that He was willing to give up *everything* in order to purchase you. To have you for His own. . . . Now, you may not have ever thought of yourself that way before – as a valuable treasure or a pearl of great value, but that is how God looks at you. For your God is your Heavenly Father, who sent His Son to pay the price, and the Son sent His Spirit to live in you and bring you to Him, so that He could take you to your Father. . . . And that is the hope that we have. That as we struggle in the Church Militant, as we are attacked daily and relentlessly by Satan, as we fall into sin and fail to do those things we know we should, and do those things that we know we shouldn’t, that still we are precious to God. That still He wants us as His own. That still His death, resurrection, and forgiveness are for us, and are always for us. For Jesus paid the price, and we belong to Him!

Now, some people have trouble with all of this. It is the scandal of the cross. And it is a scandal because it seems to turn everything upside down! For the way things work in our world today, it is not the greater who serve the lesser, but the lesser who serve the greater! And so in the military you have the chain of command. In business, it is the CEO’s who get the perks and bonuses, not the lowly workers. And so in our relationship to God, according

to the thinking of the world, since He is the Creator and we are the lowly creatures, it is we who must serve Him. It is we who should give up everything for Him! . . . But the Gospel is not like the world, and so the Son of God did come, ***“not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”*** And while we may not be able to fully understand that, it is the hope and confidence that we have and live in as Christians. That God the Creator would lay down His life for sinful creatures like you and me!

And this upside-down work of God is still continuing today. For while the life and death and resurrection of Jesus are an accomplished, historical fact, the fruits and benefits of His life, death, and resurrection still go on today, and are still being given today, as Jesus is still present in His Church, serving His own with His gifts. And so while the hand of the Pastor baptizes, it is Jesus raising another sinner to a new life in Him. While it is the voice of the Pastor saying, *“I forgive you all your sin,”* He is standing *“in the stead and by the command”* of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is giving the full and free forgiveness He won on the cross. While it is the Pastor who speaks the Words of Christ on bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, it is Jesus Himself who is present as both your host and your food, giving into your hungry mouths and souls His very life-giving body and blood, serving you at His Table. And so served and refreshed and fed and blessed and forgiven, we live to fight another day in the Church Militant. In the battle against the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. Living the life we have been given because we do not live alone, and we do not fight alone. But we ***“live and move and have our being”*** in the Son of God who has promised to be with us. In the Son of God who came and gave up everything for us. In the Son of God who has won the battle over Satan, death, and the grave, and has promised that He will one day take us out of this Church Militant and to the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

And that is what we heard will happen on the last day, in the last of Jesus’ parables in this chapter. For as Jesus said, ***“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.”*** . . . Or in other words, God knows His own. And those who by faith in Jesus Christ have been declared righteous by His blood will be separated for the Church Triumphant. Treasures and Pearls and not thrown into the fiery furnace, but are given a special place in the mansions of God. . . . And so even though now, for a little while, we must endure much hardship and struggle, at the same time we do have hope and confidence through our Saviour Jesus Christ. In ourselves, we have no hope. But in Christ, we have every hope and confidence. For as we heard from St. Paul,

***“. . . we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many***

***brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”***

And notice in those verses that there is no hint of uncertainty, no wavering, no doubt. For in Christ our hope is certain and secure. In Christ, we have the promises of life and a future in Heaven. In Christ, world and sin and death and grave can harm us none, because these He has already overcome. And so we know that even though we struggle and are attacked in this world, that even though “*the fight is fierce, and the warfare long,*” that even though Satan is plotting against us and we are surrounded on all sides by weeds – we know that in Christ, in the end we will be glorified. And this is not only our hope . . . this is most certainly true!

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.