

26 June 2026
Pentecost 9

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“My Treasures, My Pearls, My Children”
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.

We’ve been considering parables of Jesus these past few weeks. Parables that reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and that God does things differently than we do. *Very* differently.

And honestly, that creates problems for us. In Jesus’ day and in our day. For the Pharisees and Sadducees, even for Jesus’ own disciples. They didn’t understand. We don’t understand. This is not how things work in the world! This is not how we’d do things if we were in charge. So not how we think God should do things. The ways of God seem . . . wrong? silly? backwards? Why are you hanging out with tax collectors and sinners? Why don’t you show your glory more? Why do you keep talking about suffering and the cross? Why don’t you just put an end to suffering and persecution and the evil in the world? Why is my life as a Christian so hard? Why?

It’s our fault, of course. The world God created *was* perfect, until we decided we could do it better. That the knowledge of good and evil was better than life. That being our own god is better than living under the one true God. Spoiler alert: it’s not! But we keep thinking that. That’s where all the *why* questions come from. Thinking that we know better. That Jesus isn’t doing it right! Isn’t doing my life right! Why are you doing *that* Jesus? Why are you doing it *that* way? Why aren’t you doing it *my* way?

But it’s not God who needs to change; we do. A change of thinking. A change of mind. A change of heart. From questioning to repenting.

The parables of Jesus teach us of God’s way. Which brings us to the three parables of Jesus we heard today, that we repent of ourselves and rejoice in Him.

The first of which is the treasure hidden in a field. When we hear this parable, I think we assume the person who hid the treasure did so because it was valuable, and buried it for safe keeping - like the buried treasure of a pirate! But what if it wasn’t that at all? What if what got buried because it was thought junk? It was no

longer wanted. It was rusty, broken, dead, so it got thrown away, buried, landfilled. We've all done that.

Now think of all the people in the Bible the world had no use for. The poor, weak, low, despised. Orphans and widows, the blind, deaf, and lame, lepers and sinners. Those who were trampled, enslaved, used, or just ignored. Thrown out, thrown away, disregarded, rejected. . . . What this parable teaches us then is that one man's junk is another man's treasure. And in God's eyes, here was a treasure. *A treasure worth giving everything for.* So He did. He bought the field, the world, not with gold or silver, but with something of far more worth: the precious blood of His own dear Son (1 Peter 1:18-19). So that those nobody else wants, be His.

The next parable is very similar to that: the pearl of great price. Now I don't know about you, but all pearls look the same to me! I can't tell a priceless one from a fake. But the man in the parable could. Which kind of reminded me of a used book store, or a thrift shop, or a yard sale, with all kinds of stuff, all kinds of books there . . . most of which are *meh*. But occasionally, a treasure. Something someone didn't think much of, didn't know its value - but you do!

But it's not just *stuff* that can get lost in a crowd, *people* do, too. For among the millions, billions in the world, who are you? Who are you to be noticed? But God *does*. For God sees what others cannot; pearls of great value. A woman in a crowd, bleeding for twelve years, a poor widow who put just two pennies into the offering, a fisherman, a tax collector, a persecutor of the church . . . To the world, nothing, even despised. But to God, *priceless*. In the first parable, He buys the whole world, the whole landfill, to get the treasure. This one's a little different, more individual, more personal. But the same price: *all He had*. God gives everything not just for the world, but for each and every one the world thinks nothing, useless, despised. *He wants*.

This is how God sees you. You might see yourself as junk. Others might think you junk and throw you away. You might be just one in the crowd, just another face. But not to God. Not to your heavenly Father. One of the mysteries of the kingdom of God is that God would give everything *for you*. That He would trade the life of His Son *for you*. *For you*, a self-absorbed sinner. A rebel. Someone who lets God and others down on a daily basis. A failure. A burden.

And yet . . . And yet buried under the rubble of this world, mixed in with all the others . . . God sees what we do not. A dear treasure. A fine pearl. Someone He is willing to give everything for. Which is ludicrous, isn't it? We should be the ones giving up everything for God, not He for us! But we don't. And *He does*. And even if we can't see ourselves - or others! - that way, *He does*. That's how precious you are

to Him. And He wants you to know that.

To know that *by faith*. Because it sure doesn't seem that way now! It doesn't seem that way now, while we're buried in the rubble of this world. It doesn't seem that way now, while we're mixed in the great mass of humanity. But it will be seen in the end, when - as the third parable for today says, the parable of the net - when the great net is hauled in, with fish of every kind, good and bad . . . *then* will be the great sorting out for all to see. But not before then. For now, we live by faith. Faith that God knows more than us, better than us. Faith that His way is better than my way. Faith that, as St. Paul said today, ***all things are working together for good***.

Which is one of those things that's easy to say . . . Easy to have on a picture on your wall or a coffee mug with those words on it! But when the sins of others keep burying you, when the evil in the world keeps growing and threatening, when your own sins weigh heavy on you . . . *really*? What good can God bring out of this? Out of this mess, this landfill, this *cesspool* of a world? Out of the mess I've made of my life?

At just such times, of discouragement and despair and hopelessness, it is the cross and empty tomb that show us that God *can*. That from the greatest evil can come the greatest good. That from death can come life. And that it will *for you*. For that's the price God paid for you. He paid with His life. That's how precious and valuable and a treasure you are to God. That the Father would give His Son *for you*. That the Son would lay down His life *for you*. To rescue you with forgiveness for your sins, and to raise you from death to life with Him.

That's why one of my favorite pictures is of the first parable we heard today, the treasure hidden in a field. It shows Jesus pulling His treasure out of the ground - a treasure which is *in the shape of a coffin*. Jesus purchased and won you from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. So now, because of the price Jesus paid, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, to quote St. Paul again, ***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***. That is, will be able to keep His treasure dead and buried, or just mixed in with the others. You belong to Him.

That day of resurrection is coming. As sure as the sun rises each morning, the Son of God will return and the dead will be raised. But not yet. Now is still the time of the cross, the time of hiddenness, the time of mixing. But you are not hidden from God's eyes, and just as Jesus' cross worked good for you, so will the crosses you bear now in this world and life work good for you. We may *think* we know a better way, but our ways . . . well, just look around and see what our ways have gotten us, with cemeteries that continue to fill up. Only one didn't. Only one is empty. Only one is

the way that gives us life.

“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked His disciples. ***They said to him, “Yes.”*** And I think they did . . . *some*. But like us, they still had a lot to learn. And faith will always be hard, especially when what we see and feel and think is so different.

But that’s why the final thing Jesus says today: that ***the master of the house brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.*** Jesus does not leave us alone to battle and struggle with our faith and doubts and fears - He gives us of His treasure. Just as He once gave Himself for us, He continues to give Himself to us. He puts His cross, His death and resurrection, here *for you*. Bringing out the old, to make you new. To forgive the old you *now*. To raise the new you to life *now*. To feed you *now*. To strengthen you *now*. To be with you *now*. To unbury you *now*. *Treasures for the treasures.*

Which the world scoffs at. *That?* That’s what you call treasures? Water? Words? Tasteless bread? Bad wine? We have better than that!

Do you now? Maybe it looks so now. But in the end, we will see rightly. That though for now, ***we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.***

More than conquerors. What does that mean? It means that not only are you forgiven, your sins *conquered*. Not only will you rise to life, the dust of death *conquered*. Not only will you live forever, our separation from God *conquered*. But you will do so as God’s treasure, God’s pearl, God’s own child. You may not think you’re a treasure, or a pearl of great price. No one else may either. **But the cross teaches us otherwise.** That if Jesus would do that for you - not just for the world, but for you - and He has! Then you must be.

And to believe that, is the change of thinking, the change of mind, the change of heart we need. The change of heart to live differently, confidently, as ***more than a conquerer***. Not questioning, but repenting. Not doubting, but rejoicing. And confident and rejoicing, knowing who we are and all that Jesus has done for us, see others the same way, as treasures, and lay down our lives for them, as Jesus did for us. Not because we have to, but because we are ***more than conquerors***. Because the victory is already ours. Because of who you are: a treasure, a pearl, a child of God.

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.