

## **Sermon for July 30, 2017 – “Worth the Cost”**

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT, Year A – Text: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

### **Westwood First Presbyterian Church – Pastor Jeff Colarossi**

Reading this week’s text a thought popped into my head...Jesus probably loves eBay. You know, the on-line garage sale where you can bid on and buy virtually anything you can think of? Yeah, I’m thinking that Jesus loves it. Now, to be clear, Jesus doesn’t love it because He collects Star Wars memorabilia...or sells Gucci purse knock-off’s. No, Jesus loves eBay, because Jesus loves a good deal. He’s all about the joy that comes from discovering something valuable, possibly priceless, while going through piles of seemingly ordinary stuff. It’s the joy that a British antiques dealer felt after paying \$5 for an old film container. Inside, he found a never-released seven-minute movie featuring Charlie Chaplin; it was later valued at \$60,000. Wow! It’s the feeling an American literature professor had, after paying \$481 for a photograph of poet Emily Dickinson. That it’s only the second photo of Dickinson known to exist makes it priceless. Nice, huh? How about this? A nurse from New Jersey, paid \$16 on eBay for a pair of jeans. When she wrote the seller to ask about other items, they ended up meeting and falling in love. They’ve been married now for thirteen years. Now that’s a good deal ... And Jesus loves it! So, yes, Jesus loves eBay!

Some of you might remain skeptical. You may say “you seem pretty sure, Pastor Jeff, but how do we know for sure?” Well, today’s reading from Matthew’s gospel with its parables about hidden treasures and pearls of great price tells us so. A man stumbles across a pile of treasure buried in a field. He’s so taken with his discovery, so overwhelmed at its value, that he sells everything else he owns to buy the land and make the treasure his own. You might call it overkill, but Jesus says, “Nope...that’s a heck of a deal.” A merchant who makes his living pushing pearls spends his days scouring the markets for the best of the best. Upon finally finding it, the man mortgages his home and sells his cars on Craigslist, all to purchase a single, sparkling pearl. A waste you say? Not in Jesus’ eyes. For Him, such sacrifice to find such treasure is well worth the investment. Jesus is all about the joy that comes from discovering something priceless while going through piles of seemingly ordinary stuff. In fact, for Jesus, the greatest of such joys, the most magnificent of flea market finds and unexpected eBay treasures, is none other than the kingdom of heaven.

In today’s lesson, Jesus tells us that the very reign and rule of God, the loving and life-changing activity of God in heaven has broken into our world and is available now. It’s here to be discovered and embraced. Yet, like a Honus Wagner baseball card sitting in a shoebox at some grandmother’s garage sale, the kingdom of heaven is found in unassuming places and encountered in unlikely ways. And, whatever it costs you to “get it” is well worth it. So, the big question then is this, in what unlikely places do we find God’s power and presence? Some think the key to discovering God is in getting mystical and otherworldly. Using meditation, or some other process of escaping the trappings of flesh and world, ascending to some higher plane where God abides. But that doesn’t seem to jibe with Jesus’ idea of the kingdom’s being uncovered in the ordinary, now does it? Others might argue that the key to connecting with the kingdom is being good enough to gain admittance. You know, doing good deeds, going to church occasionally, writing a check now and then, and all that. And when your days are done – bingo – you’re in the kingdom. But doesn’t that seem at odds with Jesus’ own description of the kingdom? As treasure being stumbled upon in a field as if it’s something freely given?

Sure it does. And, of course, it is. Besides, aren't we justified by grace through faith in Christ? Yep! What I'm saying is that encountering God, experiencing God's power and being caught up in God's love must be things we can encounter in the **ordinary**. Things that we can access **easily**. Okay then, what about here? On earth? Is this the place where we encounter the kingdom? Is it? Let's think about that for a moment.

I say let's think about it because we tend to think of heaven as a separate place. A place where we go, assuming we've been good, when we die. But that's not what Jesus was talking about here...No. Jesus' ultimate point in the parable is that God's kingdom had come to Earth, and He was the means by which that happened! It was in Him that the love of God, the power of God, and a reconciled, right relationship with God could be ours. Christ and His work on the cross are the treasure in the field. His empty tomb is the pearl of great price. And here, this very place, is where that very same Jesus is to be encountered today. Do we believe that? Do we believe that when we gather here in this place that the greatest treasure in all Creation is here for the taking? Do we believe that when God's Word is read here, preached here and sung here that God is **speaking** here? Do we believe that when we hear the Assurance of Pardon that our sins are really and truly forgiven? Do we believe that when we hear, on those days when we celebrate the sacraments (either of baptism or communion), that something miraculous is happening? Sometimes it might seem like that this'd be the last "field" in which you'd find something so special. This place is filled to the brim with imperfect people and we preach a message of forgiveness and hope that to an unbelieving world sounds like absolute insanity. The apostle Paul said as much himself. He told the Corinthians that **"the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."**

And then there's this: What if the work of the kingdom is not only found **here**, but in each of **us** as well? Ever thought about that? What's that all about? The short answer is that as baptized, believing followers of Jesus we all are now (according to scripture) living, breathing "fields," filled with the priceless treasures of Jesus. Yes, **all** of us. Even with all our past mistakes and present problems. All our imperfections...All our flaws. At the same time we're filled with the truth. Truth that can change someone else's eternity. We're filled with the Spirit in whom we have the same love as Christ and a desire – like Christ – to bless others in need. It's as I said last week, God can and will use anyone. Why? Because we are, as Peter said, **"a chosen race, a royal priesthood...A holy nation, God's own people...In order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."**

Do we believe this? We should. Why? Because both as a church and individuals **We** are the unlikely, ordinary and easily accessible places where the world's greatest treasure can be found. **We**, each of us, are a field, a field for the wandering to stumble upon salvation. We are a marketplace of pearls. A place for the seeker to finally find what they're looking for. We are the online auction where a hurting world can bid on junk and receive untold treasure. Treasure in the form of unlimited forgiveness and eternal and abundant life. Knowing this, what do we think? What do we do?

Before you answer, let me ask...Do we come to this place each week expecting to hear from God Himself? Do we expect the Spirit to move us in some way? Do we expect to have an encounter with God's kingdom? Or, have we been blinded and mollified, placated by the ordinary facade of the same people, in the same pews, and the same people standing up front?

Are we inviting others to this field to find the treasure in this field? Are we offering others the undeserved compassion of Christ? Are we ready/willing to bear witness to the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ? Or, are we ourselves here as the seeker or the wanderer?

There's a popular show on the A&E network called Storage Wars. Have you seen this show? The show follows professional buyers who purchase the contents of unpaid storage lockers. Their bid is based on only a 5-minute inspection of the locker and what they can see only from the door when it's opened. The hope is that they'll find some hidden treasure and, of course, make a profit. Yes, this is a real television show. You gotta love reality TV. They've discovered everything from coffins and artwork to the world's most valuable comic book collection, all while paying as little as \$10 to take it all home.

So, if you're here as the seeker or the wanderer then you should know something. You should know that you have a lot in common with such modern-day treasure hunters. Today we're sitting in a place and among people that may not seem like much but if you'll open yourself up I promise you, actually God promises, untold treasure awaits us. The kind of treasure that only God himself can offer. Does it come at a cost? Sure, but less than you'd think. Taking ownership of all that God has in store for you through Jesus Christ will come at a cost. The cost of confessing your sin, your brokenness, and your need for a Savior. It means surrender. It means giving up all the stuff weighing you down, all the truly worthless stuff holding you back. As good as that stuff might **seem**, and finding something even **better**. Something that is genuinely priceless. It means saying goodbye to a life of wandering and finding peace in the fact that you've arrived...Arrived in God's family. It may sound like chump change...It may be asking the world. But I'm here to say that **whatever** the cost it's well worth the investment. In fact, it's such a lop-sided steal that it can only be called a **gift**. One that can only be described as **grace**.

Mike Ernst is a Lutheran pastor in Wisconsin. One day, looking in the classified ads, he found one for an old Chevy Corvette. As a car aficionado, and Corvette expert, his interest was piqued. When he went to look at it he knew he'd found something unique, but he did not know exactly **how** unique. So, soon after buying it from a college student he began the slow work of researching and restoring the car. It quickly became clear that this was no ordinary, old Corvette. Turns out, this old clunker was in fact the world famous 1962 Gulf Oil Corvette. A car that won 12 times in races at Daytona, Sebring and elsewhere. There's a picture of it fully restored in the bulletin. He bought it for \$3,000. Anyone want to guess how much he sold it for? \$1.5 million!!! So yeah, Jesus loves eBay. He loves a steal of a deal. He loves the joy that comes from discovering something valuable, possibly priceless, while going through piles of seemingly ordinary stuff. Why? Because He's offering the most incredible item around..Himself! Free of charge! Talk about a good deal! May Westwood First be a place where the treasure of a Christ is easily encountered. May the treasure of Christ be accessible to the world in each of us. May the wanderers and seekers among us find this treasure. It isn't to be found in expected places, and no matter what the price tag seems to be it's definitely...Undeniably...Worth the cost!

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.