

Sunday, July 30, 2017 – Eighth Week after Pentecost”
“Where Your Treasure Is”

Matthew 13: 44-52

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

Let's cut to the chase. The meaning of Jesus' words are pretty simple and straightforward this morning. The first two little illustrations remind us that what Jesus has to offer is worthy giving up everything else to have. And the picture of the net gathering up everything in its path followed by a sorting out of the catch is very nearly the same as last week's picture of last week's Gospel text of the weeds and the wheat growing together – it simply teaches that in the end God will separate people according to those who have believed in Jesus and those who have not.

Simple enough I suppose, but the question it raises as it does every week is what does that have to do with us, with you and me, with what's happening right here and now in my life, my family, my work? So let's explore that a little bit and see what happens.

The first thing you might want to think about this morning is what are those things in your life right now that you are sacrificing everything to have? Of course Jesus teaches that the only thing worth sacrificing everything for is your salvation, your eternal life. Everything else will perish, everything else will end at the grave or at the end of the world, whichever comes first. I think most everybody here probably knows that and if you don't then let me be the first one to tell you - the only worth sacrificing everything to have is eternal life, everything else will perish, it will end either at your death or on the last day, whichever comes first.

But I have such a hard time living that way. In fact sometimes I not even sure what it's supposed to look like. What is a life lived believing that the single most important thing is to know that Jesus is my Savior who died to give me eternal life supposed to look like? Because what I see this morning as I listen to Jesus teach this lesson is that I spend a lot of time and energy sacrificing everything to accomplish and get things that have no lasting value.

Not that the goals and dreams and ambitions we have are necessarily wrong or evil or sinful, but it just seems like we keep losing our perspective in the midst of pursuing them. School's coming up fast – what will you be sacrificing everything to get this year – straight A's, a place on the varsity team, popularity, the love of your life, the feeling of being accepted, a way

to escape the pressures of parents and teachers. Sometimes we sacrifice our dignity and self-respect and even the things we value most.

Some of you are barely getting by or just starting out and trying to get ahead just little – what have you been sacrificing everything to make that happen? Some of you are busy raising your children – what have you been willing to sacrifice everything for to give them? Some of you are in your prime career-building, money-making years, what have you been sacrificing everything for to make that happen? It must be true at every stage of life along the way – early retirement, mid-retirement, later years, health, freedom to be independent, each has their own set of goals and dreams and ambitions that start to consume our thinking and then become the driving influence in our lives.

Jesus knows how easily we get distracted, and then consumed, and then driven by all the other things that pour in on us every day. He calls us back every day, but especially here in worship, to recognize how perilous our position in life is and then rediscover Him. Through this worship, through this fellowship, through the precious meal of His very own body and blood that awaits us again this morning He begs us to rediscover the joy and the excitement of the man who found a treasure hidden in a field and got rid of everything else to have that field. Through this worship, through this fellowship, through the precious meal of His very own body and blood that awaits us again this morning He begs us to rediscover the joy and the excitement of the merchant who found the perfect pearl and got rid of everything else to have it.

A number of years ago a man named Craig Randall, a garbage collector in Peabody, Massachusetts noticed a Wendy's soft drink cup with an unopened contest sticker still attached. He had won a chicken sandwich the week before so he grabbed it hoping for some fries or another soft drink. What he got was a sticker worth \$200,000 toward the construction of new home.

Jesus calls us to rediscover the excitement of living in a world full of garbage knowing that there is something far better than a lucky sticker worth a couple hundred thousand dollars. The world's a mess, our lives are often a mess, but Jesus came right into the middle of the whole stinking deal and gave Himself up for us on the cross. He died because we couldn't find the treasure we have with God. He died because even when we've been told a thousand times

where the treasure is hidden - in Christ at the cross and in His resurrection - we keep losing it or getting sidetracked along the way. He died to forgive us and take us gently by the hand again today and show us what life looks like when we have Him.

It is a life that keeps doing all the regular, normal things we have to do at whatever stage of life we're in. It's a life with goals and dreams and ambitions but motivated by a clear sense of what's really going on in this world – what life is really all about.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net being dragged through this world. God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth that salvation is through faith alone in Jesus. The church is God's net. Forgiven, and made new through the cross and the resurrection you are the webbing that God is using to gather people unto himself. Your grades, your athleticism, your ability to make friends, to be a friend, to be hard working, to become a millionaire or barely make enough to get by, your retirement, your health crisis, your everything, don't you see, powered by the treasure of your forgiveness and new life is God's loving outreach to this world.

Rediscover it again this morning. And you'll have to come back again next week, I'm sure. Life is just that way. You're like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old. You learn from experience and you can bring those old stories out to help those who are just now arriving at places where you have already been. But there's always something new isn't there, some new challenge, some new success or failure that you will figure out how your loving God is using for your good because that's what he promised.

A teacher told the story about Mark, a very lively boy in her class when she was teaching in elementary school and now, Mark was one of her students in her junior high math class. She remembered that the class had worked hard all week, but by Friday the students were getting cranky. So, for a break, she asked them to write the nicest thing they could about each other student in the class and hand it in. She compiled all the results for each student and, on Monday gave the list out to each of them.

Several years later, Mark was killed in Vietnam. After the funeral, most of his former classmates gathered with Mark's parents and his former teacher for lunch. Mark's father took a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed," he said. He carefully

removed a folded, refolded, and taped piece of paper – the one on which she had listed the good things Mark's classmates had said about him.

Another boy smiled sheepishly and said, "I keep my list in my desk drawer. Another former student's wife said, "Chuck put his in our wedding album." I have mine, too," Marilyn said, "in my diary." Vicky reached into her pocketbook and brought out her frazzled list. What do you make of that?

A man once described one of his co-workers as great at running "the ninety-five-yard-dash." He added that's a distinction I like to avoid. Lacking the last five yards makes the first ninety-five pointless.

The treasure of Jesus Christ's love, His forgiveness, the power of His resurrection, His wisdom to discern right from wrong, His compassion for people, they are all yours again this morning. Run with it, run the whole way, to finish line. Amen.