

Text: Matthew 13:44-52

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. ⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. ⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

Prayer of the Day:

O Lord, your ears are always open to the prayers of your humble servants, who come to you in Jesus' name. Teach us always to ask according to your will that we may never fail to obtain the blessings you have promised; through Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia. (John 6:68 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

“He’s as cool as a cucumber.” “She’s as cold as ice.” “They’re as busy as bees.” Oh, and possibly one of the most famous of all similes, “Life is like a box of chocolates, You never know what you are going to get.” We use these phrases to help explain thoughts or quickly convey feeling. They certainly can make concepts come to life and become more vivid in the mind of the listener. Today, as Matthew records the Word of our Savior, Jesus uses three of them. **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE....** That’s how Jesus begins all three. And His point is two-fold: **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS OF ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE** and so **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS OF ABSOLUTE VALUE.**

For our purposes today, let’s look at Jesus teachings backwards. Consider first then the parable of the net. *Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 13:47-50).

Alright so as Jesus explains this one, you and I are the fish. The fishermen are the angels, and it’s judgment day as the nets are hauled in not missing a single soul. Let’s begin by asking what the role of the fish are in this parable. The answer, not a whole lot! Basically, they are dragged up in the nets as the fishermen do their work. That’s grace, not my work but God’s as He sends His angels to separate the good fish from the bad. Now it’s also true that in the real life world of fishing you want to be the one who is let go not the one who is kept but Jesus turns that on its ear. As the bad fish or the wicked human being is the one destined for the fires of hell itself. Where there is only sadness and anger, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The question comes forward, how do I make sure that I am a good fish and not a bad fish? That’s a question of absolute importance because it’s the difference between heaven and hell. So, I’ve been fishing enough to know that the definition of a good fish changes from fisherman to fisherman. What one guy

considers worthy of hanging on the wall the next may have three of in the freezer. Still another may let them go because “the big ones aren’t good eating anyway.” So, we have to go with God’s definition of good here, after all he’s the one who sends the angels to separate the fish into what He says is good and what He says is bad.

Consider, for a moment, words of David in Psalm 53, *The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one* (Psalm 53:2,3). No good! Well we’ll just have to change that and put our shoulders to the task and ... wait a minute, we cannot earn our way out of this situation either. Paul tells the Romans, *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin* (Romans 3:20).

Only after seeing the desperate situation we find ourselves in does it dawn on us anew, Oh yeah, the kingdom of heaven is of absolute importance and the answer can only be found therein. Even the of guilt and the earnest desire to repent, are not acts we can take credit for. The Gospel call supplies the very characteristics it asks to see in us. You might know the verse by heart by now. Paul told the Ephesians, *it is by grace you are saved through faith and this not of yourselves. It is a gift of God not by works so that no one can boast* (Ephesians 2:8,9). All we have is a gift from God. He has supplied all we need through his son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His life, death and resurrection, we are called good, better than good. In Christ, Sinners are made saints through faith in His work, His life of perfection on our behalf, His sacrifice of the cross, His defeat of death!

Already now the tide is beginning to turn from importance to value. Let’s reread those first two parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it* (Matthew 13:44-46).

I think we get it right, that’s what the disciples said too. The treasure in the field and the pearl of great price were of greater value than anything else these men owned so they were willing to give up everything else to obtain these treasures. So it is with the Kingdom of heaven. Do we see it of such value that we are willing to forsake all other earthly fortune, fame, or whatever bobble may dangle before us and pursue it with singular focus?

I must admit that the Devil, the World, more often than naught my own sinful flesh, they are good at pulling our focus away from the Word and putting it on all kinds of worldly things. On my own once again, I am hopelessly distracted and bouncing from all kinds of things that ultimately are of much less value than the eternal treasures of Heaven and the truths of God’s glorious Word.

So once more He reminds us of the value, even as He fulfills His own demands. Jesus’ willing forsakes all others, even the glory, power and praise which were rightfully His and takes on flesh for us, suffers the inhumanity of our humanity because He saw real value, absolute value in the Kingdom of heaven and wanted us within it. He is willing to set aside fortune, fame, even health in pursuit of us. There is not truth more valuable than that which places us in the loving arms of our Triune God.

As we see it all again, we begin to realize not only the value it poses for us but also for others. As we see the value our God placed in us we not only value Him and His kingdom but it’s work and so we reach out with the wealth He has given, in Word and in sacrament we are strengthened and we would strengthen others, always remembering that the work given is the work done and completed by God Himself as He pulls in His nets gathering in the riches of faith which alone can make bad fish good, sinners saints.

“He’s as cool as a cucumber.” “She’s as cold as ice.” “They’re as busy as bees.” “Life is like a box of chocolates.” **THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS Like ... a treasure ... a pearl ... a net and thank God it is. In his saving love, through His means of grace may God’s Kingdom ever be OF ABSOLUTE IMPORTANCE and ABSOLUTE VALUE.**