

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

APPRAISING THE TREASURE

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

31He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

33He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

44The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51Have you understood all this? They answered, "Yes." 52And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."



Parable – The Hidden Treasure – Sir John Everett Millais [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

What is unworthy in us and about us is sorted out at the cross, and by extension, at our baptism, when the bread of life is pressed into our palms, the cup pressed against our lips, and with every confession made and absolution pronounced.

DIAGNOSIS: Downward Spiral

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Treasure

“Do. Not. Seek. The treasure,” Pete says in a stage whisper to his friends. It is an iconic line from the Coen Brothers 2001 film, “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” Everett, Pete, and Delmar have escaped from Mississippi’s infamous prison, Parchman Farm. If Pete and Delmar help Everett, he promises them a share in a \$1.2 million heist he has hidden away. Pete is recaptured. He spots his friends in a darkened movie theater and tries to warn them away from the hiding spot. Under duress, Pete betrayed his friends and revealed the hiding place. An ambush awaits them if they go there.

It turns out there is no \$1.2 million dollar treasure. The treasure Everett seeks is reconciliation with his wife and reunion with his children. He figured Pete and Delmar would not help him on such an odyssey. And he needs their help because the three are chained together as they work the fields at Parchman Farm.

There is treasure offered in these parables from Matthew. They speak of increase, abundance, extravagance even. We want it. And we most certainly do not want anything to do with fiery furnaces, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Chained to the Wrong Treasure

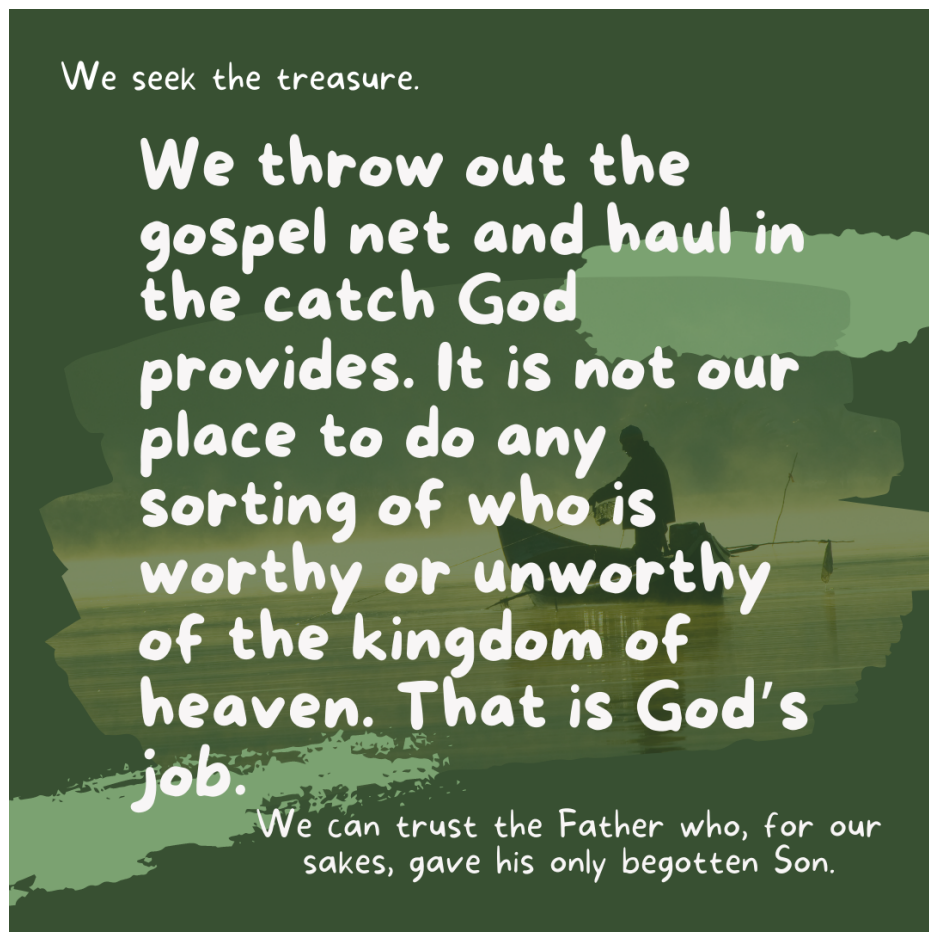
Jesus says the item of inestimable worth, the item we would give our all to have, is the kingdom of heaven. We would give our all to have it even if it appears to be only a tiny mustard seed or a little lump of yeast. I fear our eyes are more drawn to the \$1.2 million hidden in the field.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Consequences

Jesus' answer to that is something worse than Parchman Farm. We will be separated out like the bullheads from the trout when the net is drawn in.

I have been reading the prophets for daily devotion. They mostly announce the wrath of God with slim interludes of hope. The latter are what mostly appear in our lectionary. We'd rather not think, let alone talk, about God's wrath. But there it is.

If we have a problem with God, we must look to God for a solution.



From Canva

PROGNOSIS: A Different Reading

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): What If

What if we are the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price? If that is so, God will give up what is most precious to possess us for the kingdom of heaven.

Given the trajectory of Matthew's gospel, the only begotten Son of God is the one sorted out, thrown out on the city's smoldering garbage dump, and hung up to die. He does so in our place and for our sakes. He rose from the dead so that we might be raised with him to shelter in the ample branches of the kingdom of heaven.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Called to Faith

The Holy Spirit calls us by this good news. By the Gospel, the Holy Spirit works faith in us. Baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection, we are heirs with him of the kingdom of heaven. Through Jesus, we are adopted as God's sons and daughters and given seats at the heavenly banquet table even as we answer the Sunday altar call to be nourished by the bread of life.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Seeking the Treasure

As Jesus' kindred, we seek the treasure. We throw out the gospel net and haul in the catch God provides. It is not our place to do any sorting of who is worthy or unworthy of the kingdom of heaven. That is God's job. We can trust the Father who, for our sakes, gave his only begotten Son. What is unworthy in us and about us is sorted out at the cross, and by extension, at our baptism, when the bread of life is pressed into our palms, the cup pressed against our lips, and with every confession made and absolution pronounced.

We pray that it may be so for all when the angels come at the end of the age.