

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Bagging The Treasures

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

**(Proper 12-Sunday between July 24 and 30
Inclusive)**

analysis by Michael Hoy

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 seeds, but when it is 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 a 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 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 a 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."

DIAGNOSIS: Trash, not treasure

Step 1-Initial Diagnosis: Mixed Bag

In each of the five parables Jesus teaches his disciples in these verses, at the external, behavioral level that there is the problem of a “mixed bag” of offerings. Two of them speak of “fields” and one of them speaks of a mixed “catch” of fish. And even in the closing word, Jesus speaks of a mixed bag of “new and old” treasure. Discerning what is valuable and what is not fails to be readily apparent, not only to the world, but to the disciples.

Step 2-Advanced Diagnosis: Hidden

The text uses the word “hidden” in the parable of the treasure “hidden” in the field. When someone finds the treasure, he does not immediately dig it up, but leaves it hidden until he can buy the field. Those who sell the field are unaware of the treasure’s presence in the field. It is hidden from them. And that is their problem at heart; for they are unable to see, and it remains undisclosed and unrevealed to them. But that is also true of a tiny mustard seed (what difference will this make?), or the yeast in three measures of flour (what difference will this ingredient make?), or a priceless pearl in an ocean of pearls (who’s to say that one is priceless?), or the difference between good fish and bad (who’s to say what is good?). All of that remains hidden; and that is a problem of faith.

Step 3-Final Diagnosis: Thrown Out

The problem at the divine level is even more grave. All that is over-valued in the eyes of this world is not necessarily valued at all by God, whose eyes may be on different and more priceless treasures. Consequently, all to whom the kingdom is hidden and undiscernible (and that includes the whole lot of us in our

mixed-up world) may well find themselves in God's trash-bin.

PROGNOSIS: Treasured, not trashed

Step 4-Initial Prognosis: Jesus, the priceless treasure

What God has God's eye on most is the priceless treasure that has come into our world in Jesus the Christ. He is the mustard seed, and the yeast, and the treasure hidden in the field, and the pearl of great value. Yet he would become the one who would be sent into our trash-bin, and from all appearances justly condemned as among the trash of God's just judgment. Nevertheless, his entry into our refuse is not to leave us reeking and condemned, but to bring us into the fold of God's mercy, as people of great value. That is what this Priceless Treasure Christ accomplishes for us.

Step 5-Advanced Prognosis: Understanding

What we get to do, with this good news, is to "understand" how Jesus has under-stood us, stood under our beings at the bottom of the heap of the dustbin in order to raise us up. Our "yes" to this promise is our affirmation, our faith, that this Priceless Treasure does make a difference for our well-being; and our faith discloses all the fullness of the promises (benefits) that this Treasure brings: no longer insignificant, but powerful; no longer one among many, but soul-food for the world; no longer the swamped in the world's ocean, but people for whom the world is our oyster; no longer bad, but good!

Step 6-Final Prognosis: Opening the bag

As this Treasure's newly treasured, we get to let the Treasure out of the bag. We get to unfold the promises that are present (presents) in this Treasure. Even in what is old scripture, there is for the Christian scribe new testaments to be proclaimed, and new hopes to be unfolded, for this whole, mixed-up world in which we live, so that one and all may grasp the promises of the Treasure in their midst.