

"Treasure Hunt"

Matthew 13:44-52

Have you ever wanted to, "strike it rich?" Well here's a true story about someone who did. A totally unsuspecting man literally stumbled upon the world's largest diamond; all 3,106 carats of it. It happened in South Africa, in 1905. One hundred and five diamonds were cut from this one stone, known as the Cullinan diamond. Two of the largest diamonds that it produced, both over 500 carats each, are now part of the Crown Jewels of England.

Nowadays, many people dream of winning the lottery. But, actually, people have always dreamed of hitting it big, even in Jesus' day. In Jesus' time people dreamed of finding treasure buried in a field. Commerce and banking were not as they are today. There were no offshore banks in the Grand Caymans, no numbered accounts in Switzerland. So, people who wanted to secure their wealth often buried it in the ground. It gained no interest, but at least it was secure. Unfortunately, some of these people died before reclaiming or passing on their wealth. So, there it lay just waiting for someone to discover it.

In our lesson from the 13th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew this morning, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God in our hearts and lives, is like that. It is like treasure hidden in a field that someone stumbles upon. Joyfully, the finder takes everything he or she has and sells it to buy the field. Then the treasure is theirs. As if to emphasize his point Jesus adds, The Kingdom is like a fine pearl of unsurpassed beauty that a merchant finds. So, he too sells everything he has to purchase that pearl. This is what the kingdom of God is like; buried treasure; like a pearl of great price. The Kingdom of God is like a treasure hunt. This description of the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God in us, has some important ideas to communicate to us; three ideas that will lead to joy in your life and mine, if you and I will take them to heart.

And the first idea to take to heart is this: This treasure of the Kingdom is just waiting to be discovered. God's reign in our lives is not something we only enter someday when we die. The Kingdom of God is here and now. It is a present reality just waiting for us to possess it.

In West Texas, there is a famous oil field known as the Yates Pool. During the Great Depression, this field was a sheep ranch owned by a man named Yates. Yates was not able to make enough money on his ranching operation to regularly pay his mortgage, so he was constantly in danger of losing his ranch. With little money for clothes or food, his family, like many others, had to live on a government subsidy. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those rolling West Texas hills, he was greatly troubled about how he would be able to survive.

Then a crew from an oil company came into the area, they told Mr. Yates that there might be oil under his land. They offered to drill a wildcat well, and he signed a lease. At just over a thousand feet, they struck a huge oil reserve, soon giving eighty thousand barrels a day. In fact, thirty years after the discovery, a government test of one of Mr. Yates' wells showed that it still could produce more than a hundred thousand barrels of oil a day.

Mr. Yates owned it all. Yet, he had been living on relief; a multimillionaire living in poverty. What had been the problem? He did not know the oil was there. He owned it, but he did not possess it.

Jesus says to us that the Reign of God is like that. You and I already have it. It is a kingdom of great treasure, a kingdom of joy, love, and deep fulfillment. The treasure is just waiting to be discovered. That's the first idea to take to heart.

Here's the second: This treasure brings the finder great joy. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven (the two

terms are interchangeable), he was talking about the reign of God in human hearts; where God truly rules a person's life. The natural outcome for the person in whose life God reigns is joy.

That's why Jesus says that the treasure finders sold all they had to possess it. See, this Reign or Rule of God is a package. It is a life of trust; believing that the Creator of this world loves each of us individually as well as collectively; believing that this Creator has given us a pattern for living that leads to harmony with one another, and with the One who is the Source of Life; believing that because of what Christ has done for us, our lives have eternal significance; believing that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have access to God here and now. Believing and knowing that brings joy. That is the joy that personal circumstances cannot take away. The rule of God in your life and mine will bring great joy. That's the second idea to take to heart.

Here's the third: This Reign can only be fully ours if we are willing to give everything we have to possess it. What I am referring to here is not salvation itself, but the full joy of that salvation; a joy that only comes when we give our whole selves to the Reign of God in our lives. The Kingdom cannot bring us the fullness of its joy if we seek to give only a small segment of ourselves to it.

This is the reason that there are so many unhappy Christians in this world: they never did lay all they are, and all they hope to be, on the altar of God. Remember how Jesus says in Matthew 6:21 that where a person's treasure is, there is their heart also? He knows that whatever we invest our lives in, will come to possess us.

It's like a friend of Keith Emerson. Keith is now a retired Episcopal priest. But some years ago, while serving in Hudson, Ohio, he had this friend, also a priest, who one day out of the blue, wanted a group of his fellow priests to go with him to a fast-food restaurant for lunch. When

they got there, this kept friend encouraging them to keep buying as much as they wanted, but then scolded them for being too generous with free things like ketchup packets and napkins. It wasn't until a week later that they all discovered that this priest had purchased some stock in that restaurant chain. He was encouraging everyone he knew to go there to eat, but not to use the company's assets and services, so that his investment would flourish. What had once been unimportant to him was now a principle concern because he had invested in it. It had come to possess him.

Let me be clear: it is a good thing to make careful investments with our material resources. Our Lord wants us to be responsible with the material blessings he gives us to manage. The point here is what comes to possess us. Jesus is concerned about how we invest our lives, spiritually and materially, because those investments so often come to possess us. Jesus wants us to be free of being possessed by things. Instead, he wants us to possess and be possessed by joy. God calls each of us to make an investment of our whole lives. God calls us to take everything we are, everything we have, and everything we hope to become, and lay it on the altar of faith. We are to make our whole selves available to God for God's purposes, including the very life that courses through our bodies, and not just the expendable extras.

If we will, then we will come to possess the treasure of the Kingdom; a treasure greater than the Cullinan diamond, and deeper than the Yates oil field. It is a gift that only the investment of our whole life can gain. Lay your whole life at God's feet. The hunt will be over; for you will, at last, possess the real treasure of life: God's gift of unassailable joy.