

**Matthew 13:44-46**

Sixty-four years ago the Second World War was over in Europe. But hospitals were still filled with victims from the war. Many of the wounded were American soldiers. At one particular hospital most of these soldiers were missing parts of their bodies—hands, arms, legs—which had been lost during battle. One of these soldiers lying in a hospital bed had only half a face. The other half had been blown away. As the wives of these soldiers arrived at the hospital, many of them after seeing their husbands, took off their wedding rings, threw them at their husbands, and left. They simply could not cope with the fact that their husband was now half a man...half a husband. The wife came in who was married to the soldier who only had half a face remaining. She did not remove her ring. She came to his bed, reached out her arms and embraced her husband. She accepted him the way he was. Later, he said, that her love and support is what saw him through this most difficult time in his life.

You and I are like that soldier. We are not perfect specimens of what humans...of what Christians should be. We are twisted, distorted, ugly—but not to our God. In our text for today He tells us the way He sees us: you are a hidden treasure, a pearl of great value. That's how that woman saw her husband, and that is how God sees you. She overlooked the ugliness in his body. God forgives the ugliness in your life and mine.

Hear again Jesus' words in Matthew 13: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The man and the merchant is one and the same—God our Heavenly Father. You are the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value. Now the thing about pearls is that they don't float, all nice and neat, on top of the water. Pearls are found in oysters, covered with slime, buried at the bottom of the sea. In a similar way the treasure was hidden in a field, covered with dirt...buried. You are a treasure, a pearl, but we're covered with sinfulness and buried beneath a sea of guilt.

And that's just where God finds us. Not perched up high on some trophy shelf, but buried in the muck and the mire. That's how God found our first parents...hiding in the Garden, covered in shame, stained with sin. This is how you and I were born into this world... marred, defective, wretched sinners. But in God's eyes—treasures, pearls.

You may not see yourself in this way. You may see all too clearly the muck in your life; the dirt in your past. You may be ashamed, as each one of us should be, for others to know the sinful desires hidden in our minds; the awful things we have said and done. But you are who God says you are—a hidden treasure, a pearl of great value. And His desire, above everything else, is to have you for His own possession.

Yet, pearls cannot force their way out of oysters, and treasures cannot dig their way out of a field of dirt. You and I are born slaves to sin. We are unable to get away from the clutches of Satan. If we are to belong to God, then He must act on our behalf. And He does. In the parables, nothing could prevent the man and the merchant from obtaining the treasure and

the pearl. They sold all that they had; they gave up everything to purchase for themselves what they desired. And so nothing could stop God from purchasing you for Himself. It took all that He had. It cost Him His own Son. Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross—everything God had to give He gave freely and willingly so that you could be His.

In telling these beautiful parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, Jesus wants you to know that there is nothing more precious to God than you. Though it cost Him dearly, even before you were born God gave up His Son for you, so that you today and forever belong to Him.

We could call these parables of Jesus a love story. Not about our love. We, like the disfigured soldier, appear to be unlovable. That soldier was ashamed for his wife to see him the way he was, and we are ashamed for our God to see ever so clearly our acts of rebellion against Him; our wretched sinfulness against His good and gracious will. But as the woman came to her husband and loved him, so God loved you. It's not that we did anything good or loving. We were lying there stuck in the muck and mire. We were buried there in the field, covered with the dirt of a lifetime of sinfulness.

We did not find God...He found you. We did not see Him as a treasure and a pearl...this is how He sees you. We did not give up all that we had to purchase God for our self—and we still don't; we selfishly cling to the things of this world which are passing away. And yet, out of love and pure joy over you, even though you and I are nothing but sinners, God gave up His Son, Jesus Christ, for you.

Each one of you is a hidden treasure...a pearl of great value to God. Yet, I doubt if we see each other that way. I think, instead, that we look at the imperfections and ugliness in each other. We're like those wives who saw their disfigured husbands, took off their rings, and left. We don't see the other members here at Christ Lutheran Church as pearls of great value before God; we only see the muck and the mire which covers them. We don't see our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ here as treasures before God; we look for the dirt in their life.

We need to remember these parables, therefore, again and again. We're all covered with dirt. We're buried up to our heads with sinful stains. But God has forgiven each one of you. You are a treasure to Him. He gave up His Son for you. Your God does not look at the dirt in your life; He sees only a forgiven child when He looks at you. He sees a hidden treasure. We're all living in muck and mire. Each one of us is covered with a sea of guilt. But God, in baptism, washed you in the sea of Christ's blood. You are pearls of great value to Him. He does not notice the imperfections in your life. He forgives you. He declares you, for Jesus' sake, to be holy and innocent.

And because this is how He sees each one of us we, too, can look at each other in this way. We can see our spouse as a wonderful treasure. We can see our children as beautiful pearls. We can behold this family, this congregation, as the forgiven people of God, loved by Him and precious to Him.

And as we do this, let's remember where we came from—the clutches of Satan; the muck and mire; the field of dirt. We are, therefore, not proud that we are treasures and pearls—we are grateful...grateful to God, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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