

We have good reason to be upset with Jesus' disciples. When He asked them if they understood the parables in our text, they said "Yes." Had they said "No," Jesus surely would have explained these parables, as He did with the Sower and the Seed and the Weeds of the Field. So, now we are left to try and understand these parables on our own.

The Net we can figure out because Jesus sort of explains it in the end. But the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value – these can have us scratching our heads. Indeed, they have. Two explanations have been put forth. The traditional view and a more recent one.

The explanation of these two parables which the church's theologians presented for centuries on end is captured by the hymn: Jesus, Priceless Treasure. This explanation makes sense. Jesus is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value. When the Holy Spirit leads a poor sinner to the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, it is like a treasure to him. A hidden treasure, even. "Where has this good news been all my life!" he might exclaim. The Gospel gives him great joy. And the Holy Spirit leads him to the conviction that nothing else in his life is more important than Jesus.

It is certainly true that Jesus is the greatest treasure in our life and the pearl having the greatest value. But is He static? Meaning, is Jesus without movement? Lacking in activity? Simply a body at rest? This is what characterizes the treasure and the pearl in these parables. They're lumps. They sit there doing nothing. No verbs are ascribed to the treasure and to the pearl. The verbs belong to the man who finds the treasure, and to the merchant who finds the pearl.

What verbs are in your life? Are you searching for the hidden treasure? Meaning, are you actively seeking Jesus? Finding Him, do you express joy? Understanding His value in your life, are you putting Jesus first, selling all that you have so to speak, because nothing is more important than possessing Jesus? We can ask the same thing about the parable of the pearl. Are you doing everything, every verb ascribed to the merchant in this parable, in order to have Jesus, the pearl of great value?

Maybe you are, some days. But those days when you are not, these parables can be a kick in the teeth. They painfully remind us that we are not being good treasure hunters and pearl seekers. We have to do better because, after all, Jesus is worth our very best effort.

When our daughter was little, she loved being read to. Her favorite story in her children's Bible Story book was the one of the hidden treasure and pearl of great value. But it was not because these parables stressed to her how important and precious Jesus was in her life. Instead, it's because she learned from these parables how important and precious she is to Jesus.

This is the other way, the more recent way, of explaining these parables. I did not come up with it. I learned it from those who were gifts of God to me – some very Christ-centered professors and pastors. This way of explaining these parables proclaims the Gospel in all its sweetness.

Now, it is true that when we sing God's praises, we are telling Him that He is the most precious treasure in our life. Nonetheless, Jesus is the one telling these parables to us, not us to Him. He is

speaking these parables to us because He wants you and me to know, and truly believe, that there is nothing more important and precious to Him than you.

To Him, you are treasure, even though you are buried in the dirt and filth of sin, as am I. And for Him, He counts it pure joy to give up everything He has to redeem you and make you His own. He did this, you know. He emptied Himself completely for you. He was stripped of life itself, dying the death of a cursed sinner on the cross. Yet, this agony was joyful for Jesus because it was the way, and the only way, to bring you out of the devil's field into God's house and family.

Someone asked me last week if it was a dirty trick the man in the parable did by covering up the hidden treasure after he found it, because in doing this, he could purchase that field without its owner realizing it contained buried treasure. Actually, this is an interesting question. And if you or I were to do that, it would at the very least be considered unethical.

But consider the fact that to Jesus you are a treasure, but not to the devil. Oh, he wants you for himself, but not because he treasures you, but because he hates you and wants you to suffer forever within his filthy field of sin and death. Jesus simply would not allow that to happen. In purchasing you for Himself, Jesus bought the entire field. He redeemed the whole world. All sinners He purchased with His blood.

And having redeemed you, He cleansed you of the dirt and filth that covered you in the waters of Holy Baptism. Every stain of your life is washed away. Every filthy sin in your heart is forgiven. And the devil cannot tell you otherwise because you do not belong to him anymore; you belong to Jesus who bought you.

So, now we ask Jesus' question: "*Have you understood all these things?*" If you answer "No," then meditate on these parables and their meaning every single day. If you answer "Yes," then meditate on these parables and their meaning every single day. Because the devil will never cease to plague you with the thought that in God's eyes you are not worth much.

Perish that thought! Jesus came to seek and to save you. It gave Him great joy to sacrifice everything to redeem you for Himself. It's because you, my friend, in His eyes are, and always will be, a treasure and pearl of great value. Amen.