

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: The Parables of Jesus: Provocations in Wisdom

Sermon Title: "The Parable of the Hidden Treasure"

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:44

Listener's Journey: I want my listener to see two sides of Jesus' Parable of the Hidden Treasure--the exacting cost of generosity in the face of scarcity thinking and the outrageous joy of aiming to be as generous as God.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

One thing that needs to be mentioned before discussing the meaning of this parable is that the word "parable" literally means "laid beside."¹ So, when thinking of Jesus' parables and him often saying "The kingdom of God is like..." It is important that we see the parable as more than a simile. Unlike a simile that offers mere comparisons, Jesus' parables actually contain truths revealed by the comparison. The kingdom really is the way that Jesus' presents it.

In today's parable the kingdom of God is presented as a treasure. That in itself is not that unusual. But, listen to what Christian author Thomas Keating wrote about this parable:

"...what is unusual—and problematic—is what happens in this parable once the treasure is found. The man in this parable was probably a day laborer. In those days, people did not always have a bank handy. Because of the (dramatic changes of fortune and mis-fortune) of the times, people sometimes hid their treasures in a field, hoping to return later in a period of peace to dig them up. Thus, it was not unusual for a day laborer working in somebody else' field to come upon a buried treasure. This man hid the treasure again, and then went off and bought the field.

The hearers are left with the problem of evaluating the morality of his conduct. If he owned the field, there would be no sense in hiding the treasure. If he had a just claim to the treasure, why would he hide it again? There is clearly an element of scandal in his behavior."²

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Keating's insights raise important questions that send the meaning of this parable toward implications much deeper than the basic idea that we are to consider giving all that we have in service and love to God. Consider additional issues raised by Keating:³

- In rabbinical law, if it was not clear who owns the treasure, the owner of the field was presumed to own it. Evidently this man hid it because he was trying to conceal it from the rightful owner.
- The man went and sold all he had and bought the field. Once it is safely concealed in the field, he cannot dig it up again without people wondering how he got it.
- Though the man has the treasure, he is more impoverished than before, because he has now sold all of his possessions. He winds up with an enormous treasure that he cannot do anything with.

¹ <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/3850.htm> (accessed 5-18-19)

² Edited for accessibility. Thomas Keating, *Meditations on the Parables of Jesus*, Crossroad Publishing Company, © 2010, page 81-82.

³ IBID. Content taken from pages 82-88.

- In a way, this parable presents the kingdom of God like winning the lotto where a person finds a treasure without any work or merit justifying the treasure, and then faces a number of ethical dilemmas as to how to steward someone else's treasure of immense worth.
- God's great risk with the human race is that the lotto-like-treasure of abundant and eternal life is given without our seeking it. It is already there among us and within us, hidden in plain sight.

When we think about all this—in light of the teachings of Jesus and the first followers of Jesus who amplified such central and immense themes of the Christian faith in Scripture such as grace, or unmerited favor, and unconditional love—we need to admit that everyone who awakens to the holistic love of Christ is exactly like a worker who uncovers a huge treasure in someone else's field. And, if we do not learn how to use the treasure properly, it may become a scandal for us as well.

What do I mean, specifically? This parable alerts us to the fact that the kingdom, although it is given us as a sheer gift, is not given to us exclusively for our benefit or the exclusive benefit of our specific religious tradition. And, it is not to be used selfishly in any way or through any means because it was never ours in the first place. And, in comparison to Jesus' parable of the workmen in the vineyard where everyone was paid the same wages whether they worked all day or only in the last hour, today's parable and the dilemma within it challenges us to see two sides of it: the exacting cost of generosity in the face of scarcity thinking and the outrageous joy of aiming to be as generous as God none the less.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. How do you wrestle with ethics and quandaries around the topic of generosity?
2. Why is generosity sometimes easy and joyful, and other times difficult and exacting?
3. What are a few ways that you can be generous by encouraging a few people this week?