

The Parables of Jesus  
*Provocations in Wisdom*

“The Parable of the Hidden Treasure”  
(Matthew 13:44)

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SCRIPTURE

<sup>44</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matthew 13:44 New International Version (NIV)

Introduction

1. On this date, May 19, 1990, *twenty-nine years ago* I was married to a gorgeous bride name Holly Lynn Pupich.



Some look at this photo and do not believe that this is our wedding photo. Well, it is! I had hair on my head, Holly had long curly brown hair and our bridesmaids had huge marshmallows on their shoulders! The wedding was dubbed by my father in law “The Coronation” because we invited all of our music school friends to attend and more than 60 musicians agreed to play and sing in the wedding in exchange for free food...



...another part of the wedding that I’m pretty sure my Father in Law took a while to forgive since he and my Mother in Law paid for all of that “free” food. In the spirit of today’s

Scripture and the parable of the hidden treasure—we most certainly cashed in all four years of college friendship favors to buy a treasure that day! I will never forget walking through the Eastman School of Music Cafeteria for several days with a big stack of volunteer agreement forms. Holly and I think that everyone was willing to play and sing for food because we were the first of our peers to get married and it was a bit of a novelty and it was strategically placed on the Saturday after classes had ended and before graduation. What I know for sure is that we were in love and for me, our wedding was a chance to create a grand gesture for my bride and our friends and family.

2. It was a *great* day! And, a bit of a crazy week because there was so much to be planned, and with a few gaffs popping up along the way—like the moment, only a few days before the wedding and Holly commenting to me “don’t forget to bring the wedding band to the church on Saturday” which drew a blank stare from me. “Uhhh, wedding band? What’s that?” “The coordinating gold ring that is supposed to be placed on my finger next to my engagement ring in the ceremony” She replied. “I thought that you were going to just take your engagement ring off and put it back on again?!” I replied.

While those words were sheepishly falling out of my mouth, I was replaying a moment seven months earlier when the jeweler selling me a not terrifically affordable engagement ring asked me “do you want to buy a wedding band with this engagement ring?” And me, with less than infinite wisdom saying “no, thank you” because I assumed that he was just trying to up charge me with some kind of wedding add on!

3. Yeah, I was barely out of my teens and clearly had a lot to learn about marriage, including generosity, the focus of today’s parable. Holly, on the other hand, has embodied unbridled generosity her entire life fully emulating the music theater role “Dolly Gallagher Levi” she once played in the musical *Hello Dolly* where she often repeated the phrase to her love interest Horace Vandergelder: “Money is like manure. It’s not worth a thing unless it’s spread about, encouraging young things to grow.”<sup>1</sup>
4. Today’s parable speaks to Holly’s kind of wild and passionate generosity as well as to my gaffs of youth as a young groom. And, typical to a parable of Jesus, there are also some twists and turns to consider in the two-sentence parable of Matthew 13:44:

<sup>44</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matthew 13:44 (NIV)

## A. Explanation of the Parable

1. One thing that needs to be mentioned before discussing the meaning of this parable is that the word “parable” literally means “laid beside.”<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hello,\\_Dolly!\\_\(musical\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hello,_Dolly!_(musical)) (accessed 7-23-10)

<sup>2</sup> <https://biblehub.com/str/greek/3850.htm> (accessed 5-18-19)

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 misfortune) 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's 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."<sup>3</sup>

2. 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:<sup>4</sup>
  - 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.
  - 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.
3. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Edited for accessibility. Thomas Keating, *Meditations on the Parables of Jesus*, Crossroad Publishing Company, © 2010, page 81-82.

<sup>4</sup> IBID. Content taken from pages 82-88.

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.

## B. Application of the Parable

1. So, how can we apply the layers of the meaning of this parable to our everyday lives? Here are few considerations:

- First, realize that anything that takes us out of everyday life is hazardous. There is a reason why most people who win the lotto go bankrupt and end up with their lives in ruin—generosity and plenty is more of a state of mind than the size of a bank account. And, sustained joy is best found in the ordinary flow of the ups and downs of everyday life that includes real constraints inviting us to consider courageous and creatively earned outcomes.
- Next, consider the exacting cost of true generosity in the spirit of our Creator—it doesn't come with strings attached or quid pro quo—or extending a favor in order to get a favor in return. This was the whole idea behind what Jesus called, “The New Covenant” or the way God has always wanted to relate to created beings—God's love and favor is not based upon the fickleness of human behavior and response--it flows to us ceaselessly—with those who move into and with the flow as the greatest recipients of that love and favor. So, our generosity, in whatever form it comes out of us, is to be grounded in the idea that we give to others in the same way it was given to us—as an unearned surprise and with joy, hiding no good thing from others. Think about this when we give either a monetary gift or the gift of time, dignity, or some other resource to another person or organization.

And, I encourage us all to never under-estimate the immeasurable value of taking the time listen to someone else and give them the encouragement they need to help them reach for the treasure that God freely gives to every human on the planet.

- One more consideration—in this time of identity politics and exclusion of many kinds against some of the most vulnerable of our society, and even as the First Covenant Church community faces possible excommunication from its denominational family because of our inclusive commitment to equal treatment and care for all people—that we seek to be as generous and inclusive toward those we defend as those we need to defend against. It will be a most intense struggle and yet ultimate joy over the next 5 ½ weeks to remain committed to clear minded inclusion and generously framed love for all concerned, even to those for whom we strongly disagree. This is a once in a lifetime moment to embody the best of our Christian faith, even as we are likely to face some of the most challenging headwinds of our time blowing not only in the Covenant family of churches, but in many places across our society.

## Conclusion

On the weekend of the 29<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of my marriage to my spouse Holly, I have been reflecting on the ways, over these three decades of life, that I tend to have a bent toward favoring big and extraordinary opportunities (like a 60 piece orchestra and production at our wedding ceremony) over the gift of finding joy in the context of everyday life constraints. I am often tempted to see gestures of generosity as add-ons like a jeweler trying to upsell me some superfluous band rather than more of a kingdom fueled outward flowing generosity.

And, dear friends, I am giving much time and energy to do the inner work to be able to hold and transform my anxieties and frustrations with the Covenant Denomination's struggle and unwillingness to struggle with so many important matters around human identity and the gospel. So, I ask for your prayers and your wisdom, as does the leadership of First Covenant. Like the parable, we have found a treasure, unconditional love, that needs to be declared found, attributed to its rightful owner, and shared so that all benefit.

May all of us, in this time and a moment of testing, rise to embody our most generous selves in order to steward a treasure of immeasurable worth.

## Prayer

God of all creation including created beings as small and yet loved as ourselves—we pray that we learn to be more faithful stewards of your grace and love. We pray that we are more open and courageous enough to express and embody the more expensive and exacting versions of your generosity such that we experience more lavish versions of joy. Help us to love others as you love us.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

## Benediction

You may be wondering if Holly every got a wedding band. Well, she did. Her father had to buy it because we were out of money! Over the years I have bought her beautiful rings out of penance. And, it brings her great joy to have the variety that fits her personality.

This year was the first year that Holly bought me one of the coolest wedding bands ever, that is literally made out of stars, earth, water, and responsibly sourced fossils as a symbol of the treasure that we have found and imperfectly and yet beautifully shared for 29 years. Thank you, my love!

So, for our benediction and as our new week begins, and in the spirit of unbridled generosity in the face of so many struggling with scarcity—may we find outrageous joy in never burying our treasure and always aiming to be as generous as God.

Go in peace. Amen.