

## **Homily for Trinity VIII – 2023 - The Hidden Treasure and the Goodly Pearl**

In his commentary on St Matthew's gospel, William Barclay reminds us that the parable of the hidden treasure, like all Our Lord's parables, would have struck a strong chord of recognition in His hearers. Hiding one's valuables in the ground being such an everyday way of ensuring that they would not fall into the hands of one's enemies.

In his very popular book of 1876, 'The Land and The Book, ' (it was a book of his experiences in the Holy Land during a journey he made in 1857) the Presbyterian Missionary, William McClure Thompson, wrote of the discovery of an enormous horde of golden coins hidden in a garden in the Port city of Sidon. They were coins that all dated back to the time of Alexander the Great and his Father, Philip. That is about 360-325BC.

Much more recently, in 2009 actually, at Shrewsbury in England, a man unearthed 10,000 Roman coins in a field on his very first attempt at using a metal detector. Those silver and bronze coins ranged in date from 240-320 AD. The haul was found intact in a Terracotta pot weighing 70 pounds and an extra 320 were found while scanning the surrounding areas.

About three years prior to this discovery at Shrewsbury a Filipino fisherman made an even more amazing discovery in the sea off the coast of the Palawan Island, in the Philippines. It was a two-foot long pearl inside a giant clam. He took it home and hid it under his bed – keeping it as a good luck charm. His tiny home burned down, but fortunately the pearl survived. Now called the Pearl of Puerto, it has been verified at 26 inches (66cm) in length, 12 inches (30cm) in width and weighing nearly 75 pounds (34 kilograms). It is presently valued at \$100 Million US Dollars.

Enough about discoveries of coins and pearls both old and new. What was Jesus saying in these two obviously related parables?

Firstly the hidden treasure: The man who discovered the treasure was doing his daily work, going about his business, as it were. There is, in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, a saying of Jesus: "Cleave a (piece of) wood; I am there. Raise up a stone,

and you will find me there.” When the carpenter is working at his craft and the stone mason is working with stone... Jesus is there. True happiness, true satisfaction, the sense of God, the presence of Christ are all to be found in our day’s work, when that work is honestly and conscientiously done.

Brother Lawrence, the saintly mystic lay brother of the Carmelite community in Paris in the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, spent most of his life in the monastery kitchen among the dirty dishes and yet he could say: *“I felt Jesus Christ as close to me in the kitchen as ever I did at the Blessed Sacrament.”*

A second lesson we could draw from the parable of the Hidden treasure is: it is worth anything to enter the Kingdom. Now to enter the kingdom is to know and do God’s will, so it is worth anything to do God’s will. Doing so may well require us to give up certain aims and ambitions, to abandon certain habits and ways of life which can be very difficult to lay down, difficult indeed, in order to take on a discipline and self denial. In other words, to take up our cross and follow after Jesus.

Now turning to the pearl of great price. To ancient people, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions. So the kingdom of heaven is the loveliest thing in the entire world. Again, being in the kingdom means knowing and doing God’s will. It is not a bleak, or grey, or agonising thing to do God’s will. It is a lovely thing. Beyond the self-discipline, beyond the sacrifice, beyond the self-denial, beyond the cross there lies the supreme loveliness which cannot be found anywhere else.

We can all find joy and loveliness in art, music, literature and all the triumphs of the human spirit. We could find great loveliness in the humanitarian service of our fellow humans. Nevertheless, the supreme beauty lies in acceptance of the will of God. This is not to belittle any of the preceding but the supreme pearl is the willing conscience which makes us friends of God.

Now, the man who was digging in the field was not actually searching for treasure...it came upon him all unaware. The man who was searching for fine pearls was spending his life in the search. No matter whether the discovery is the result of a chance moment, or a lifetime’s search, the reaction was the same... everything had to be sold and sacrificed to gain the precious object. However we might discover the

will of God, whether it be in a lightening flash, or at the end of a long and arduous search, it is worth anything at all to unhesitatingly accept it.

Some of you may have read my essay last Friday about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his book, 'The Cost of Discipleship' he had this to say about these two parables. Its a longish quote but he puts the matter far better than I possibly could. I quote:

“The treasure hidden in the field is costly grace; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.

It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.

Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of His Son: *"ye were bought at a price,"* (I Corinthians 6:20) and what has cost God so much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered Him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”