**Sermon – Sunday 26th July 2020 – Trinity 7**

**May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Our Gospel reading today continues the theme that Jesus has been following of using every day examples to highlight spiritual truths.

Last week we heard the parable of the wheat and the tares and on Friday we heard the explanation of the Parable of the Sower and today we have a number of references to aspects of life that his audience would have been very familiar with.

In case you are wondering, the verses omitted from this morning’s reading are those that we heard last Sunday explaining the parable of the wheat and tares and follow a pattern that Jesus would often explain the meaning of the parables to his disciples in private.

One of the themes of this morning’s parables is that of value, and not as we may initially think sacrifice.

For example, in the account of the man who sells everything to buy the field with treasure in, we do not actually know if the treasure was worth more than he initially had, but it was of greater value which is why he wanted to possess it and sacrificed what he already owned.

Similarly with the string of pearls – was the pearl he bought of greater worth than the all he sold or was it of greater value?

Too often we equate the term value with monetary worth – how often have you sat and watched a programme like Antiques Roadshow waiting for the valuation on an object to gauge the reaction of the owner, especially when they are told the item that has been passed down the generations is worth thousands?

But then the response that to them the object is priceless and no amount of money would tempt them to sell – its value far outweighs its worth.

I wonder what you value most?

One of the consequences of the current pandemic and the associated lockdown that we all experiencing and are likely to be experiencing for many months to come is the opportunity it has given all of us to reflect on what we value in our lives.

The enforced absence from loved ones and the changes to our daily routines has highlighted what is important to each of us and what we miss and thus what we value.

As lockdown has been gradually eased, people have been speaking about what they are looking forward to doing or re-engaging with and how these items can shape their lives and help their general sense of well-being.

Apart from the obvious re-engagement with family and loved ones, it can be the regularity of a daily or weekly routine, work colleagues or those regular encounters we have at the shops, walking the dog, the commute to work.

Value is also a subjective term – what is valued by one person might not be regarded as of value by another person – hence some people are keen to return to the office as they value the interaction with colleagues and people whilst others value the relative peace of working from home.

This theme of what is valuable is one that is contained within our readings today and I want us to think for a few moments on what they are showing us about God and our relationship with God.

In our Old Testament reading, we heard the story of Solomon, the son of David, and a conversation that he has with God.

God says to Solomon – “Ask what I should give you?” – an open invitation to ask God for anything.

I don’t know about you but I would probably have presented a shopping list of things that I would want, but this is not what Solomon does.

He recognises the position that he is in, with the responsibility that he has inherited from his father David to govern, will require wisdom and this is what he asks God for.

And God grants Solomon his wish and because he did not ask for things for himself, God also blesses him with many riches.

Whilst Solomon was not a perfect king, he went onto build the Temple in Jerusalem and to be known for his wisdom – as is attested in the Wisdom writings that bear his name – the Wisdom of Solomon.

So the value of wisdom.

In our Gospel today we hear Jesus tell the crowds a series of parables in what appears like a quick fire period of teaching.

The five parables that Jesus tells each has its own message or theme and they help us to reflect on the power of the kingdom of heaven and what is of value, concluding with another reminder about judgement that we thought about last week with the wheat and the tares.

* The parable of the mustard seed, which produces a plant far in excess of what we can imagine from such a small seed.
* The parable of the yeast that the woman mixed with three measures of flour – I am told this would produce enough bread to feed a small village.
* The parable of the buried treasure that makes the man go and sell all that he has to buy the field and thus gain possession of the field and treasure within it.
* The parable of the pearls, with the wealthy merchant selling all the other pearls to obtain this one of great value.
* And finally the parable of the fish and the sorting that took place when the net had been landed.

Five parables which speak of the kingdom of heaven, of value and of joy.

As with many of Jesus’ teachings, there is a degree of exaggeration and licence with his teaching – for example the parable of the buried treasure ignores the fact that it would have belonged to someone – in those days before banks and safety deposit boxes, people buried their wealth in the ground to keep it safe.

However there are important messages, as always, within these parables.

The first two speak of the growth that can occur from small beginnings – a small mustard seed producing a large plant – enough bread to feed a village – and if we allow God’s spirit and power to work within us, both as individuals and as a community, we can see miraculous growth.

But we do need to allow God’s spirit to work and to seek God’s will for what we do so that the growth can happen.

The seed and the yeast did not work in isolation.

Paul writing to the Romans that we heard in our second reading reminds us that it is the Spirit that intercedes and helps us to pray, to seek that wisdom from God that in the words of the Psalm we had today, “it gives understanding to the simple”.

The second two parables speak of the joy that someone can gain when they discover the kingdom of heaven.

In both these parables it is not about the man or the merchant becoming materially richer, but of obtaining something of great value and the sacrifice required to obtain it.

So it is with us if we seek the kingdom, we may have to sacrifice things in order to experience the joy of the kingdom – to let go of things in our lives that are holding us back.

If we look back throughout the history of the Christian Church, we can read of men and women who have come to realise the joy of the kingdom in the simplest of things – we think of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, St. Francis of Assisi, who gave up everything to live a simple life and yet had a richness of life.

They found value, not worth.

Now we may not be called to give up everything – but we might be – to experience the joy of the kingdom and to value what is important in life.

We will gain a glimpse of the kingdom if we place our trust in God, offer to him our lives, our possessions, those things that we treasure and value and allow God’s spirit to direct our lives.

And we are reminded in the final parable, as we were in last weeks’ reading of the wheat and the tares that at the end there will be a time of reckoning, of judgement.

As we go out from here today, let each of us pause for a moment and think about what we value, what is precious to us and what we would be prepared to sacrifice to gain a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven and to celebrate the joy that we experience when we do indeed know God in our lives.

**Amen.**