

“OH WHAT A TREASURE HUNT”

One of the enjoyable things about preaching is finding interesting stories to tell to illustrate a point. Here is one I think you will like.

A U.S. Air force veteran bought a Rolex watch in 1974 through the Air Force Exchange, while in Thailand. He bought a Rolex oyster Cosmograph, after hearing it was good for scuba diving. When he received the Rolex, he decided it was too nice to wear in salt water and decided to lock it away in a safe deposit box. At the time it cost him \$345.97, which was a lot of money to pay on his small military salary.

But it turns out he made a good investment.

While appearing on an episode of “Antiques Road show” filmed in Fargo N.D., four decades after purchasing it, this veteran learned his watch, which was unworn and came in the original box with certification, and a guarantee, could fetch between \$500,000 and \$700,000 at auction.

Not surprisingly upon learning the value of this pristine watch, the battle worn veteran fell to the floor in astonishment. I think I might have too. Some people have all the luck.

Which reminds me of a story that Jesus once told? Listen to these words of our Lord. “The kingdom of heaven is like a 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.

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went and sold all he had and bought it.

Jesus is telling about two discoveries that were worth selling everything their owners had, nothing held back, in order to acquire the treasures. That sounds sort of like investing in a Rolex for some of us with limited means.

JESUS IS REMINDING US THAT THERE ARE SOME THINGS IN LIFE THAT ARE PRICELESS. These things are worth much more than a luxury watch. For example how much would you take for your health? Let's face it some of us are selling our precious health quite cheaply, aren't we?

Or how much would you take for one of your children? Some of you are thinking, it depends of which one your talking about. How much would you take for your good mind? Many of us do not appreciate the really important things in life until we lose them. There are some things that are priceless, though we may not realize their worth at the time.

Growing up I remember how impressed I was with my father's nearly eidetic memory. For example, you could ask him what was the annual waterfall in Idaho in 1967, and if he had ever seen that fact, somewhere at some time, he could recall it and tell you. But about ten years before his death he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and over time I witnessed his loss of ability to remember people's names, and important family events, and directions to familiar places. He thought his sons were his brothers. And eventually he couldn't speak at all. A mind is a terrible thing to lose.

Some things are priceless. They can't be measured in dollars. Your life is one of those priceless things, your family is another. Your mind and health are another example, of something priceless. But most important is your soul. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When the man found it he hid it again and went away and in great joy and sold everything he had and bought the field.

The Kingdom of heaven, he added is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. Finding one of great value he went and sold everything and bought that pearl.

Note that both of the precious finds were worth everything to these men. In other words no matter how much you may own, no matter how glamorous you may be, no matter how high on the I.Q scale you register, if you have missed out on the kingdom of heaven, you have missed out on the one thing in life whose value exceeds all others . Nod your head if you understand that. _____ this is the most important thing I can say to you.

If it is true that the kingdom of heaven is worth more than everything else we own, don't you think that you and I should know more about this kingdom that Christ is describing, and furthermore, don't you think that this should be our foremost desire to receive that kingdom for ourselves? What can we say this morning about the kingdom of heaven that will help us see how precious it is?

By the way, the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are considered by scholars to be interchangeable. During Jesus time a good Jew considered the name of God so sacred that he or she would not even write God's name. Perhaps that is the reason that

Matthew, who was writing to a Jewish audience, was hesitant to write “kingdom of God” for fear of violating the holiness of God’s name. So he used the term “kingdom of heaven”.

What is this kingdom that Christ spent most of his ministry proclaiming and how can we go about acquiring this treasure for ourselves? It’s interesting to me that even though the kingdom of heaven was the primary content of Jesus teachings it is almost an unknown idea to many Christians’. So, let’s try to get our minds around this important concept that Jesus talked so much about.

HERE’S THE MAIN THING WE NEED TO REMEMBER: THE “KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” EXISTS ANYWHERE THAT GOD RULES.

Does God rule in your life? Then you are already experiencing the kingdom of heaven. Wherever God is, there is the Kingdom. This is to say that wherever God is there is love, joy, peace and total contentment. What would it be worth to you to have love, peace, joy and contentment in your life.

There was an interesting story online several years ago about the world’s third richest man Warren Buffet. Buffett is now 90 years old and has an estimated net worth of \$83.3 billion dollars. That’s a great deal of money. Somehow, with all that money, Buffett has managed to maintain many of his Midwestern values as well as a wonderful sense of compassion. Buffett is a wise man when it comes to money. People have paid small fortunes to solicit his advise. So he is dubbed the “Oracle of Omaha”. How much would it be worth to you to have lunch with Warren Buffett? Each year Buffett auctions off a chance for someone to have a personal meal with him and he gives the proceeds to charity. For the past couple of decades, he has donated the proceeds

from the auctions to the Glide memorial foundation, a ministry of San Francisco's Glide memorial UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, located in the inner city, Castro district. Glide memorial is a remarkable multicultural church committed to helping the homeless, the marginalized, and the most vulnerable among us. Since its inception, these lunches have raised over \$30 Million dollars for this important ministry. Would you like to know how much the most expensive lunch was. One winner paid \$4.6 million dollars. I wouldn't pay that for lunch with anyone today, which is a mute point, as I don't have the funds to invest in anything more than the Rolex the veteran purchased

LUNCH WITH WARREN BUFFET IS ONE THING, BUT HOW MUCH WOULD YOU AND I PAY TO LIVE IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN CONTINUOUSLY? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT WOULD IT BE WORTH TO HAVE GOD TOTALLY RULE OVER OUR LIVES? How much would it be worth to us to have the kingdom of God live within us? That of course is what we most resist. Do we really think that we can do a better job than God in ordering our lives? We love to be in control don't we? Even if being in control offers us a mediocre life at best. We miss so much in life because we refuse to turn over complete control of our lives to God.

There is a fascinating story in God's little Devotional Book for women, taken from the Los Angeles Times some years ago. According to the news story, a screaming woman was trapped for a time in a car dangling from a freeway transition road in East Los Angeles. A half dozen people stopped, grabbed some ropes from one of the vehicles, tied the ropes to the back of the woman's car and hung on until the fire units arrived. A ladder was extended from below to help stabilize the car while the firefighters tied the vehicle to tow trucks with cables and

chains. Every time they would moved the car, she would scream in pain. It took 25 people two and a half hours to pull the woman to safety and as they kept pulling her, she would say “I’ll do it myself. She was broken, in pain, with no control of the situation, and she wanted to pull herself out.

That’s like us isn’t it. We want to be in control of our lives, even if we sometimes mess things up terribly, even if we are not satisfied with our lives. Yet Jesus says to us that we will never find the abundant life that God offers us until we put ourselves completely under his control.

Who doesn’t like a treasure hunt, who hasn’t dreamed of winning the lottery, this is a parable we can relate to as humans. But true joy doesn’t come from outward circumstances but rather from inner assurance. Joy is a byproduct of a sense of purpose and perspective, that faith gives us.

Those of a certain age may remember the name Norma Zimmer. You will recognize her name only if you watched the Lawrence Welk show, because she was a popular singer in the orchestra. I remember watching the show with my cousin every week and we would blow lots of bubbles and dance in circles while watching and listening to the entertainment. Well Norma had a difficult childhood as a result of her parents drinking. Singing was her escape. As a high school senior, Norma was invited to be a featured soloist at the University Christian Church in Seattle. When her parents found out she was going to sing this particular song they insisted on attending the service. Norma tells about the horror she felt when they came in late, in a state of disheveled intoxication, weaving up to the front were the only empty seats were.

After she sang and took her seat, her heart was pounding and her cheeks burned with embarrassment, the pastor preached on the scripture verse from Psalms 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength an ever present help in times of trouble."

Norma said to herself "My own troubles seemed to bear down on me with tremendous force... I realized how desperate life in our family was without God, and that day I recommitted my life to him. Jesus came into my life, not only as my Savior, but for daily strength and direction." TRUSTING GOD AND GIVING GOD CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE IS THE KEY TO VICTORY IN EVERY SITUATION.

Christ offers us this same treasure today. It is the kingdom of heaven at work in our lives. God within us, God beside us, God giving us strength for the living of our days. This treasure is worth selling everything else in your life in order to purchase it. But, in fact, it is a free gift. Open yourself to Christ's kingdom today. Amen.