

Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

“Have you understood these things?” They said to him, ‘Yes.’”

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Previous to these parables the disciples have been confused, they have asked the Lord *‘why do you speak in parables?’* They have pleaded, *‘explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’* For *‘they shall hear, but not understand; and seeing, not perceive.’*

Now something has changed. The Lord Christ asks His disciples in private if they understand these parables, that of the *treasure in a field*, of a *merchant in search of pearls*, of *fish, hidden in containers*. They answer, without question, *‘yes,’* and Jesus doubts them not.

Rather, He gives His disciples a strange title, they are *masters of a house, who bring out of their treasure what is new and what is old.*

What is it that these great saints, the Holy Apostles, understand? And what have they that is *new and have they that is old?*

To know this, we must understand the parables. What do these three parables have in common?

In the first, a man finds a treasure hidden in a field, and sells all to gain it.

In the second, a merchant finds a *pearl of great price*, and exchanges all his worldly goods for it.

In the last, fisherman cast nets deep into the sea, to draw out fish, keeping

the good for themselves, and throwing out all *the bad*.

What is this treasure, this pearl, these nets, but the Word of God, the Gospel of Salvation? The Gospel is hidden in a field, even as the Eternal Word was sown into the world through the Virgin Mary. The Gospel is held within a shell, for the Son of God was sealed within our human nature. The Gospel is the fisherman's net, for it delves into the depths of the saving waters of the Church, that from them it might draw out Christians.

In every case, the Gospel is concealed, even as the Lord conceals the mystery of the Kingdom within these many parables. The earth covers the treasure, a shell covers the pearl, the deep covers the nets. So too does frail flesh cover the Lord God; so too do historical doubts cover the simple words of Scripture, printed upon perishable paper; so too do philosophical quibbles cover the doctrines of the truly catholic and everlasting Church.

So, even where it is everywhere present, just as fields are everywhere, shells are everywhere, seas are everywhere, yet the *treasure is hidden*, lest one seek, for in *seeking, ye shall find*.

Yet the one who seeks must not merely find, but *give all they have to the poor, and take up their cross, and follow*

Christ. For what else is meant by the man in the field selling all he has, or the merchant trading all his goods, or the fisherman casting away half their fish? Christianity is not a thing of ease. Though it is an everlasting Sabbath with God, it is an endless trial with man, for nothing disgraces a man more than the cross. Live in hospitality, and generosity, and lose your wealth, and the world will count you among those irresponsible men who squander their fortune won in the lottery and end their lives in the projects.

Walk unto the truth, with honesty and humility, *walking humbly before the Lord*, and all power will be taken from you, for it is lies that buy power, and arrogance that gains public confidence.

Confess the Gospel, *in season and out*, and you will be cast out as a simpleton and fool, too unread or uneducated to understand the supposedly wise meaninglessness of this life, with its implied fatalism and pleasure-seeking.

This all one gives up: wealth, power, pride, that one may dive to the pearl, or dig up the field. One must sacrifice the world to gain the *life of the world to come*. One must become poor, that He may be rich, and *lowly, that he may be exalted*.

'Take up your cross.'

Now there is something even stranger in these simple parables. In each case, the treasure, once it is found, is not immediately lifted up in a moment of ecstasy, but rather hidden again, whether once again into the field, or within the shell of the pearl, or into the container of fish, only to be gained, somewhat deceitfully. What is the meaning of this?

It is several. As it applies to the Gospel, it shows hope, for the great gain to be made from what has been found is not yet manifest, but shall be exposed at the right time, the day of the Lord's return.

As it applies to the Christian life, it demands humility, that we not *pray from the rooftops as the scribes and Pharisees do*, but do as we ever ask of our God, to live in all quietness.

As it applies to the Christian death, it promises peace, for to the Christian, death is but the uncovering of a great treasure, the finding of a deep hidden pearl. In radiance shall Christ shine forth from the depths of the earth, from the enclosure of His human nature, and transform us in our final sleeping, that *we may be as He is, for we shall see him face to face*.

This is the meaning of that utterance of the Lord *'a master, who brings out of his treasure, what is new and what is old.'* For the old man, with his old world, and his old life filled with old sin [and the unending old miseries of this world] we bear with us still in this life, but behold, we shall take out of our treasure *what is new*, that is, the life of the old man renewed by Him who *makes all things new*.

Now the Son of Man completes His parables for the time being. It is written that after He said these things, He *returned to His home town*. It is good that His teaching cease for a time, for He has work to do.

For you see, there is a treasure hidden in a field; a pearl within a shell; a sea of good fish; and all these He must gain, for it is written, *'the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of the face of the earth.'*

You are His treasured possession, and indeed He must gain you. *For what shall separate you from the love of Christ? He shall endure tribulation and distress, persecution and famine, nakedness and wrath and sword.* All these things, He shall embrace as a man embraces a bride; as the Son of Man embraces a cross. For it is the will of the Father, that He might have His *treasured possession.*

All these miseries and anguish, this blood and mockery the heavenly Father promises to Christ His only begotten Son, if He will indeed save His people from their sin.

The Father asks: 'Have you understood all these things?' The Son replies:

'Yes.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts:

Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Romans 8:28-36; Matthew 13:44-52.