

*Ordinary Time 17A 2017*

*The Pearl of Great Price*

For the past several weeks, Jesus has been teaching us about the kingdom of heaven through a series of parables. He has taught us that the kingdom of heaven is like seed scattered in a field, the better the ground on which the seed falls, the greater the harvest. The more we understand and embrace the kingdom, the more the kingdom transforms us. Jesus has also taught us that not everyone belongs to the kingdom; there are those who have aligned themselves with the Evil One. But there will be a time of judgment, and when that judgment comes God will separate the weeds from the wheat.

Today Jesus teaches us the most important lesson of all: the need to give ourselves entirely to the kingdom when it appears in our lives. Jesus uses two parables to teach us this: the parable of the treasure hidden in the field and the parable of the pearl. In the first parable, a man accidentally comes upon treasure buried in a field. He has not been looking for this treasure. He has not been seeking it. He simply stumbles upon it buried in a field. But he immediately recognizes what he has discovered, and he sells everything he has to buy the field so that the treasure will be his.

The second parable is different. A merchant has been diligently searching for a particular pearl his whole life long. And now, after searching for a life time, he finds it. But to purchase this pearl, he must sell everything he owns, something he gladly does because he has found what he has been looking for his whole life long.

The hidden treasure and the pearl are the kingdom of heaven—the presence of God in our lives. They are Jesus Christ who is the presence of God in our lives. Like the man who accidentally finds the treasure in the field, some people have never sought Christ or had a deep relation with

him. But then one day, Christ makes an appearance in their lives. One day they understand that Jesus is the face of God. One day they understand that they have been looking in all the wrong places for happiness and fulfillment. And when they understand this, they surrender everything so that Christ may live in them and, for the first time, they are content.

Other people, like the merchant in search of a fine pearl, have been actively seeking the meaning and purpose of their life their whole life long. They seek the purpose of life in many ways, but nothing satisfies them. Then one day, they encounter what they have been seeking, and they immediately recognize that it is Christ. And because they recognize Christ, they surrender everything to make Christ the center of their lives.

One of the great musicians of the twentieth century was Herbert von Karian, the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic. In 1967 when I was a student, I watched him conduct the Berlin Philharmonic in Berlin. Recognizing the greatness of von Karian, a reporter asked him the secret of his success. Von Karian thought for a moment and then replied, "Choose one thing, and forsake all others." This is the secret of success. Choose one thing and forsake all others. But we must choose the right thing, the right person. This is what Jesus has been teaching us these past few weeks. Seek the kingdom of heaven; everything else will fall into place. Seek God in Christ, and all will be well. Seek the Lord and you will live. When you find him, you will find the kingdom, and when you find the kingdom, forsake all else and you will be happy.