

Sermon from 7/26/2020
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Hunting for Buried Treasure

When I was in high school, this movie came out that everyone seemed to see, and everybody seemed to know. It's called "National Treasure". The main character discovers these clues to a treasure map, and he realizes that the map is on the back of the U.S. Constitution. His former partners now want to find this treasure, because it is rumored to be the greatest treasure of all time accumulated and protected by the forefathers of our nation and going back to the Knights Templar in the Middle Ages. Well these people decide that they are going to find this treasure and steal the U.S. Constitution. So, the main character, doing what any movie action hero will do, he decides to steal it first. He steals the treasure map and goes on this crazy hunt to find the greatest treasure of all time. Now because it is a movie, there are trap doors, bad guys with guns, and they are running everywhere trying to find this treasure. When they finally find it, it is more than they could ever imagine. It's more treasure than has ever been accumulated and they decide that it is so much treasure, that they need to share it. It's more than they can have. Therefore, they divide it up and give it to the museum in Cairo, to the Louvre, to the museum of Israel, the biggest museums around the entire world. There is simply too much and it's too great to keep, so they share it.

Today we listen to Jesus again speak in parable after parable. He has been speaking in parables to the people for all of chapter 13. I wonder if the people began to think, "Is this the guy we are listening to?" This isn't how they expected their messiah to talk about the kingdom where God would reign. This isn't talk about a giant leader sitting a throne with a big crown on his head, who has all the riches and all the wealth around him and amassed a large army. This is a man from nowhere Nazareth, sitting among people talking about mustard seeds.

Mustard seeds may be tiny, and they may produce a large plant. You and I may see mustard everywhere, so we expect this story to be about the faith of a mustard seed. But mustard seeds aren't something that farmers want. Mustard seeds grow into weeds in this 1st century society. They sprout up in the middle of fields, because you can't see this seed due to its small size. When they are plowing their nice and neat rows, and everything looks perfect as they plant and they get ready to harvest only to go out and discover there is a mustard seed bag there. Some mustard seed must have ended up in their bag of sizes and was too small to notice until it grew. This plant would be like kudzu to us. It eats all the nutrients around it, we want to pull it out of ground because it strangles the plants that we do want. Mustard seeds are so small that they can be hidden.

Then Jesus goes on to talk about this parable of the yeast. This is unexpected as yeast is considered unclean for Jews. This is an outlawed substance that Jesus is comparing to the kingdom of God! This woman is putting this unclean substance into her bread. Part of the reason God outlawed yeast is that it is dangerous. Their yeast in the 1st century is different than ours and its slightly spoiled before it goes into bread and you have to be careful, because if it

spoils too long it will cause food poisoning. And here Jesus is talking about this woman making bread with leavening.

The kingdom of God is like this yeast. First, it's like a weed, and now it's like something that is outlawed by God that we don't want. These are confusing parables.

Then Jesus totally switches gears, and now the kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field. This is the story of God that we long to hear. That it is like a treasure hidden in a field that someone has found, then hides so that he can sell everything to buy the field where it is hidden.

Then Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of a great pearl and sells everything so that he can buy it.

Then the kingdom of heaven is like a net filled with fish and the tastiest fish are hidden in the net until the fish are separated. The treasure is hidden. The pearl is hidden. Then Jesus asks the disciples if they understand these parables and they say "Yes". Well, I beg to differ, because I do not fully understand what Jesus is saying or why Jesus is saying this, but Jesus is saying it, so we have to pay attention to it, even if we don't fully understand. Even if the meaning of the parable is hidden.

In 1867, a boy in South Africa named Erasmus Jacobs, was playing in his father's farm around the northern cape. They are incredibly poor and destitute. Erasmus is just running and playing around the bank of the Orange River, when he looks down into the river and sees this big, giant stone that's clear. Nothing like anything anyone has ever seen. It's translucent and it catches his eye and he picks it up and he takes it home. This young boy discovers the first diamond. To this day, South Africa is one of the largest mining areas of the world for diamonds and this little 15-year-old boy just happens to come upon it. Compare this story to the National Treasure, where they have been searching for decades and even generations to find this great treasure and this boy just stumbles upon great wealth.

This is like the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes we are looking for God and God is everywhere, and we are still looking for God, that inbreaking of the Holy Spirit to bring us joy and life and peace and forgiveness. And other times when we are not even paying attention, we stumble upon the face of God. We stumble into grace and mercy and see God for who God is. The glory and majesty of the King. That king that these people standing on a hillside, that I'm sure are wishing Jesus would talk about.

What do all of these parables have in common? They all talk about how something is hidden. Think back to a field and the farmers that have their bag of seed and they are plowing and planting row after row. They are tilling the ground and planting seeds and they are anticipating coming back out to come and find their great harvest. Imagine their surprise when they come out and discover that they have made a mistake. An awful mistake. After all of their careful

planning and diligent work, somehow a mustard seed managed to be planted and now they have this giant bush. This bush is sucking the life out of all of the other plants.

This reminds me of how we think of church. We have careful planning; we have nice neat rows after rows. We have liturgy. We have programs, staff members, ideas, visions, teams, meetings, committees, all to decide what we think that God needs to be doing in our midst. We hope and pray that our plans align with what God is desiring to do in our midst. After all this work, we can suddenly discover that God has shown up in a different way. That those nice neat little rows and places that we identify as where we are digging for Jesus, Jesus decides to show up somewhere else and sucks all the life out of all of those other things and brings it into this inbreaking of God. It pulls all of the resources and all the nutrients into it so this bush can grow strong and mighty. This is how the kingdom of heaven works.

Despite all of our efforts, despite all that we are asking God to do, may not be what God has decided to do. God shows up in hidden places that we are not expecting. This is bigger and thrives in a way that we never expected and is better than anything we could have thought or planned. See the beauty of grace is that it shows up. Despite all of our best efforts for good, or when we get in the way of God, God still shows up. It shows up and it has the ability to take over.

Sometimes we are in a time in our lives where we are experiencing suffering or some event that has shaken us and we need to dig for that buried treasure. We aren't in a place to look out into a field and see where God has suddenly shown up; we need that pearl. We need that diamond that we might stumble upon. We need to go hunt for buried treasure. And the kingdom of heaven is like people who search for God.

"The kingdom of God is at hand". Jesus says. And these are pretty mundane everyday tasks, someone discovers something in a field, baking bread, a merchant performing his job and finding a pearl, planting seeds, fishing and casting out nets. These are ordinary tasks. The kingdom of God is in the ordinary as well as the miraculous. The kingdom of God can show up in the most mundane aspects of life, whether you are making a sandwich using some bread, or you are worshipping, or when you are crying in the shower as that no one can see your grief, when you sit in a hospital bed and cry out, when you pick up a child and see their smile. All of this is the kingdom of God.

The paraments for this season in the church are green. In the church we call this color and season Ordinary Time or Kingdomtide. It's interesting that Kingdomtide, the time when the kingdom really shows up is ordinary time. We expect the kingdom of God in times like Epiphany or Advent leading to the coming of the Christ child, or Lent leading up to the resurrection, or even at Pentecost. We expect God to show up then, but ordinary time? Ordinary time lasts longer than any other season in the church by double.

When you graduate from Duke Divinity School, you receive a cross that is made out of the same glass as this beautiful stained-glass window, called the Pentecost window. Every class is given a different color that is found in the window. My husband was in the class ahead of mine and he

received green for ordinary time, and I will never forget sitting in Divinity school chapel the day they received it. The preacher proclaiming that God is in the ordinary time. That in the everydayness of ministry and of life is where God really shows up but is often where we miss God the most. God is in the everydayness of who we are, because we are created in the image of God. We desire to be with God because God desires to be with what God created.

Now you may be the person that is looking for a treasure map to find the kingdom of God today. You may be scouring the earth or desperately digging to try to find God. Or you may be stumbling out into the field to find a mustard seed that has grown and revealed God's self to you. Or as Christians we often know people who are looking for hope. Who are hunting for buried treasure, but don't have the map. That want to find this thing that gives us peace that passes all understanding and joy unspeakable. This breath of heaven. This connection to the one that created us. The assurance of hope.

We have the map, the Word of God. We have something powerful to share. This map that you can hold can reveal the kingdom of heaven to people that are searching for it. We are called to share it, to go anywhere and everywhere, to be undignified in our pursuit to share the map. As we begin this new time in ministry here at St. Matthew where we will be actively sharing this treasure map, I ask that you join me in prayer. To pray that God reveals God's self to us and the people God is calling us to reach. To see the face and places where God is asking us to share our map. We don't have to do it perfectly, just earnestly. As much as we plan to do it perfectly, and have our rows and rows of seeds, and somehow that mustard seed takes over. While that doesn't look like what we are planning for, it is what we pray for. We pray that no matter what we do, God shows up and strangles all of our other plans, so we only follow God's path. I ask that you take out your bible, your map, and read a little to remember what it is that you are sharing. To look for things that might give you hope. I encourage all of us to spend a little more time seeking after the treasure, because when we find it, it is so glorious and overwhelming that maybe we will want to leave everything else behind, just to hold on to it.