

Love is Possible
Sermon for Our Neighborhood Festival
Sermon Text: Matthew 13:44



“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

How wonderful that you all are here! I’m so excited that you came! And I’m happy that we can celebrate this day together. I’m also so happy with this good weather that God gave us. And I’m happy we were able to spend so many special days together this week. I’m especially thankful for the many people that

could help us out this week. This year, you can easily recognize our team members because they all are wearing a special shirt like this one. Can all our team members please stand for a moment and I ask the rest of you to please read what is printed on our T-shirts! “We are here!” it says. And something else is written underneath – “we are here for you!” This second half of the sentence is a promise, and with this promise, each team member says: I want to be here for you, 100 percent. You are special! You are important! You deserve special attention! To be honest, that’s a pretty big promise! And perhaps some are thinking, they intend to do something impossible. Or maybe you think, that’s typical church. Like in advertising, they talk big but in the end, nothing happens. Or the same with some politicians. Right when they have something to hide, they strut around and boast about how good they are. No, we don’t mean any of that when we say: “We are here... we are here for you!” Quite the opposite. We know that we are human and we know that we can’t always be there for everyone. Yes, sometimes we are painfully aware that we make mistakes and that things don’t go as they should. Yet we say with great conviction and no ifs or buts – “We are here and we are here for you!” When we say this, we can and will say it only because we know that we are not alone, but there is someone in us and with us, and He alone is there forever. He knows each one of us. And He who knows each one of us also made each one of us personally. He wanted each one of us to be here. He loves us, exactly as we are, with all our faults and imperfections. I’m talking about the man we can see here on the front of the church – Jesus! He is the one who has always been there and is still here today. It is actually He who says: I am here for you! Now this Jesus can’t be seen with eyes and touched with hands. He is hidden from our eyes. Yet, He is here. And He can reveal Himself to each one of us. When that happens, you have found the greatest gift and the greatest treasure there is to find. Jesus wants to tell us a story about that today. This story wants to tell us that you can actually find Jesus where you least expect Him. And His story goes like this:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

A farmer goes to plow his field. Now you have to know that plowing in those days was not with a tractor and many big plowshares. No, it was much more difficult. Back then, a farmer would only have one plowshare and an ox or two that had to pull this plow. The farmer then had to ram the blade firmly into the soil and while pulling the plow, the hard dry Israeli soil was dug up. Occasionally it happened that big stones were buried beneath the earth. This was a big problem for farmers back then because then everything had to come to a stop. The farmer had to stop the oxen and clear the obstacle out of the way with a shovel and their hands. This is exactly what happened to the farmer in Jesus’ story. He was plowing, then there was a thump, and everything came to a halt. I can imagine how the Israelite farmer then cursed. What a mess. Just a moment ago, it was going so quickly and now he has to let everything stand still. The oxen got to rest a bit while the farmer cleared this obstacle away by hand, which he then did. Precisely at this moment, as the Israelite farmer stood there cursing under the sun, the greatest miracle that could happen, happened – what lay hidden beneath the earth was not a stone nor was it another large obstacle. It was a great treasure chest with lots of money! I can imagine how this man took one coin after another out from earth with a trembling hand and how the gold must have glittered under the bright sun. The farmer knew that from now on, his life would be different. His life took a

radical turn. Nothing would be the same as before! His life and his destiny had radically changed for the better. And with that, Jesus' story was over, but He summarized it in this way: This is exactly what it is like when we come to know God.

So, what is it like when we come to know God? First by not noticing anything. Yes, really. At first, you don't see anything of God at all. Like the Israelite farmer, you go through everyday life completely unaware of what lies hidden beneath the ground. It is the same with the church. The people who sit together here and who are part of the church are normal people. There's really nothing special about them. Even those who walk around with those T-shirts that say: "We are here...we are here for you," are normal people with all the same flaws that all other people have. Yes, it may even be that we as a church and we as Christians are a stumbling block and an offense. It may be that we are just as much a nuisance as the stone was to the Israelite farmer in the hot sun. It may even be that the church annoys you! Or you are irritated when people want to tell you something about God. If that's the case, then it's a good sign. How was that again with Jesus' story? When the farmer first came upon the golden treasure, he didn't know what it was. Yes, he was very annoyed. Oh no! Not again! Another obstacle! What a pain! I have to stop! I can't go on like before! And it wasn't until he gradually shoveled the dirt away and discovered the big chest of gold that everything changed. This is exactly how it is when we get to know Jesus. It was like an obstacle at first! What an annoying thing! What may look like a burden is the most important treasure you can ever have. That's how it is in this story. The farmer, who just a moment ago was cursing the supposed stone that was under the ground, now knows what he has. Not a stone, not an obstacle, but the greatest treasure that anyone can have! And what do you do when you discover such a treasure? You bet everything on the treasure! That's what the farmer did in this story. He sold everything he had, all he wanted was just this piece of land because he now knew the value of the land. I can imagine how the neighbors complained about him. What a fool. He sold all his belongings to buy this piece of dry earth! Yes, but they didn't know what was hidden underground. They didn't know about the treasure! This is what it's like with Jesus, with the church. Anyone who suddenly and unexpectedly encounters Jesus knows how important He is, and that life will be different now. What drove the farmer to sell everything and just want to have this one piece of land? It was nothing other than the clear knowledge of what lies hidden on the property. Even more important, what's the value of Jesus? What makes Jesus so important? It is not about money! It's not about winning the big lottery jackpot. It's about something much more important. It's about the most important treasure of all. It's about the fact that you and I may discover the following: "I am loved!"

Here's a true story – a woman talks about her hard childhood. She was a difficult girl to educate and was therefore the most unpopular girl in school. Nobody could deal with her. No teachers, no schoolmates, not even her parents... And she said the following: "No one comes into the world and wants to be hated. Everyone wants to be loved. As a girl who was difficult to educate, I also wanted to be loved. I just believed the whole time that I couldn't be loved. I thought that I was not good enough to be loved. And then, this is what happened. One of my teachers kept proving to me through words and actions that she loved me. And I thought all the time, when is she going to snap? When is she going to scold me, insult me, hate me, just like all the others? And I was waiting all the time for this to happen. Until I finally came to the realization that she really loves me. This woman said: "The experience of being loved was the most important experience of my life. Knowing that love is possible and experiencing that I can be loved, changed my whole life." So you could say it was the treasure in the field for her that made it worth selling everything else. And this is exactly what Jesus gives us. I'll conclude by asking a question. What is it that convinced the farmer that this piece of Israelite dirt was valuable? It is this fact: Jesus loves me. Jesus wants me! And through Jesus, God loves me. This is more important than all the money in the world. And this is exactly why Jesus is so important and so valuable. He came to love us not just for a time, but forever. He didn't just come when we were particularly well-behaved or good people, but He loves us even when we are full of faults. And that is why it is worth it to leave everything and follow this Jesus. Amen.