

A Treasure in Plain Packaging  
Sermon for the 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Sermon Text: Matthew 13:44-46



Sometimes, Jesus shares deep nuggets of wisdom with us through the means of a long story. But there were also moments when He brought a story to life in our minds with just one sentence. Today, we hear two such sentences from Jesus that run like a movie in our minds. I will now read these two sentences from Matthew 13:44-46: *“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.”* <sup>45</sup>*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup>who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

Each one of us has a picture in our minds from listening to these two sentences. First there is the person who hid the treasure. We ask ourselves: who actually was this person? And what caused him to hide treasure in the dirt? Was there a war? Did he have to flee? Or is there another reason? We have no information regarding who this man was. Only one thing is completely clear – in our story, he is initially the only one who knows the value of the treasure. To everyone else, the treasure must remain hidden deep underground and unknown. The treasure we’re talking about must remain in the dark for now and its value must remain hidden from everyone except for the one who buried it there. Then we see the one who owns the land. Unlike the one who buried the treasure, the landowner is unaware of what kind of treasure he owns. Legally, he is the owner of the treasure, but he doesn’t know it. He only knows that he owns a piece of land that he could probably sell for a reasonable price. But if he knew what was hidden on his land, he would never sell it. The person who finally finds the treasure is equally unaware of what the treasure means and what is down there in the earth – this man walks across the field or plows there and stumbles over something hard that initially interferes with his work. At first, he thinks nothing of it, but then he takes a closer look. You can imagine that the hard box irritates him at first because it stops him from working. Maybe he curses while he must leave his oxen and plow to clear the obstacle out of the way. He sees that it’s a box, he digs it out, takes out his pocketknife, and opens it. What he finds inside the box blows his mind. It’s treasure: money, jewels, precious stones. When he woke up that morning, he thought it was just another normal day, now the day has burst out of its boring, everyday routine, everything is different, his whole life is different.

The story that unfolds before our eyes through the hidden treasure was deliberately staged by Jesus. The story wants to make us aware of the value we received through the Kingdom of God. The story also wants to make us aware that this Kingdom of God can’t be recognized immediately or naturally. Everything remains hidden at first and we can’t help but relate the story of the Kingdom of God to ourselves. Yes, what was it like when you became a Christian? Was there a voice from heaven calling you, a special experience? Some of this may have happened, but it usually isn’t like that. Normally, we don’t consciously search for God’s Kingdom, we stumble upon it by chance. We didn’t search much for God, for Christ, for the Kingdom of Heaven, we more or less stumbled upon it “by chance.” Perhaps we came to the church through friends, perhaps our parents took us to be baptized and then to church services as children. Someone once told me that he came to church because of his beautiful wife: she said, “First the baptism certificate, then the marriage certificate!” But this man also stumbled upon a treasure, and this treasure changed his life. It gave him new worth and completely new perspectives opened up. Of course, it can also be different. It could be that we are consciously searching and looking for the meaning of life, or even for God. Jesus’ second sentence causes another movie to play in our minds. It’s about someone who is consciously looking for special pearls until he finally finds this pearl that is better and more precious than everything else. Yes, there are also some of us who have consciously set out to search for God, some have read the Quran and have not found God there. Others may have visited various churches to see if God could be found there. They were constantly searching until they finally found the precious pearl. Here too, the pearl changes everything.

The precious treasure that Jesus describes as the goal and meaning in both sentences is the Kingdom of God. But what is the Kingdom of Heaven? What is so important that we are willing to and should risk everything for it? If you have often flown in an airplane, you may know the sentence, "In the event of an emergency, please leave all your personal belongings behind." If an emergency occurs, it's immediately clear what is most important – saving lives. Then suddenly, everything else is unimportant: expensive cell phones, computers, even credit cards are left on the plane, insignificant, and you just make sure that you make it out of that plane with your life, because now it's only about saving lives. It's similar in the Kingdom of God. When we enter the Kingdom of God, it's all about eternal life, it's about our salvation, it's about whether we will stand before God in the final judgment, and when we see that we are before God, we really do have to be able to leave a lot of baggage behind us. There are many things in our lives that can block the exits to eternal life so that we can't find the way or that limit our Christian life. The question for us is whether the Kingdom of God is worth it to us. Do I believe in Jesus if He promises us eternal life through His life? Could it be that the Kingdom of God often remains hidden? Like a farmer who is plowing his field and is briefly disturbed by a hard object under the ground but doesn't worry about it any further and carries on with his daily life without ever discovering the precious treasure underneath the earth. Or do we want a Jesus or a kingdom of heaven that only makes sense here on earth? People have difficulty believing in the treasure in the field. The very fact that it is hidden is a nuisance to us, so it can happen very quickly that Christians leave the treasure under the ground while we bring other things to the front that are more plausible or make more sense to us. That's why Christians have repeatedly made the mistake of portraying the Kingdom of God as a worldly, earthly kingdom. Jesus' example clearly shows us that we do not initially recognize the Kingdom of Heaven as a treasure, it remains hidden from us, and we can't make the Kingdom of God believable to ourselves. We must therefore not try to make the Kingdom of Heaven more palatable with any kind of tricks. This is what people do, for example, when they try to portray a kingdom of peace in this world. They have confused the Kingdom of God with a just political system. But that is a deception and is not the Kingdom of God that Jesus is talking about. The picture that Jesus paints for us is not chosen at random. The Kingdom of God that Jesus paints for us here is so inconspicuous that no one knows its value except the one who puts it in the ground. That's why we find Christ and His Kingdom in very simple vessels, in a very simple box. We find Him in the Word of God, in a simple book – we find Him in the Bible. And the Bible was written with the participation of people like us, yet it contains God's Word. We also find the treasure in simple worship services, in, with, and under simple water at baptism and the same with the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. We find it in a simple church and we find it among ordinary people, united by the Holy Spirit. But this Christ, in simple and plain packaging, is everything to us. He is our most precious pearl. It is the most precious treasure that we find by chance. That's why the man from the field goes home and sells everything. The pearl merchant does the same. Compared to what awaits them, their current possessions are of little importance. They do what is perfectly clear to anyone who has to leave a plane in an emergency: "Leave personal belongings behind!" Paul describes it in today's epistle: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phil. 3:7-8) Paul knew this because Christ had met him, because Christ had called him. And that applies to you too. Christ found you too, He bought you and paid for your sins too. So don't cling to the things that can't help. Turn to Christ, your true treasure who is not destroyed by moth or rust (Matt. 6:20), who will not become redundant with the next downsizing, who will not be destroyed by illness and death. Invest in Christ, it's the best investment you will ever make. It's worth putting the other things aside.

There is one thing I have not yet said, which is what Jesus' two sentences about the pearl and the hidden treasure convey. It's about the joy that the finder has. The treasure and the pearl have opened up completely new perspectives and joy for the new owners. New worlds have opened up for them. Christ opens up new perspectives for you too. He gives you forgiveness every day and in abundance. He gives you a new start where you have failed, freedom and openness in places where you can no longer go any further. He gives you hope. He opens the way to eternal life. He gives your life meaning, including giving what you do here on earth meaning. He who created the world gives you strength and new life. He gives you joy – joy in Him, in yourself, and in your neighbor. It is worth investing in this treasure – it is worth passing this treasure on so that it bears fruit for others too. It is worth it because God Himself is the one who buried it and is now passing it on completely free of charge. Amen.