

## Lectionary 17 A 2017

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

July 30, 2017

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

Jesus shares with his followers parables of *appraisal*. One thread that goes through the parables in this morning's gospel is *appraisal*. These are parables of the kingdom of heaven. In most of them something is appraised. Something is evaluated. A price is put on it. Someone found this thing and they went and withdrew all of their retirement savings to buy this particular field, or to buy this particular pearl.

*Appraisal*. You may have seen a popular show on public television. The *Antiques Roadshow*. It's a TV show about *appraisal*. They will go on the road and visit a town like Tulsa or Tampa or even Tucson. And people will bring in all of these antiques that look like junk to most of us. And usually the show's host will say, "*Surprise! This is a very rare antique in very good condition and it's worth thousands upon thousands of dollars.*"

*Appraisal*. Part of what Jesus is saying in these parables is that the kingdom of heaven is like treasure that is easily mistaken for trash by those who lack spiritual insight. [By the way] That seems to be a big theme of Jesus and the Bible. *God CHOSE— Saint Paul writes— God CHOSE what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God CHOSE what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God CHOSE what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.*"

God chose David— out of all the tall and strong sons of Jesse, God chose the short stack, the runt, the wiener, to be his greatest King. God chose Mary— the poor young woman of Nazareth to be the doorway for his Son to become human flesh. When Samuel was sent by God to identify David among all his tall and strong brothers, God said secretly to Samuel: "*The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*"

This is spiritual appraisal. Hidden value. Hidden treasure. God sees it. You may see it. And you may do big things in order to keep it, to cultivate it, to share it. And Jesus says today that this is what his kingdom of heaven is like.

So: (1) Maybe you've known a young person who fell in love with the novels of Jane Austen and will never let go of Jane Austen for the rest of their life. That person's dedication is an appraisal of something of great value, something to treasure. So: (2) Maybe you know a war veteran who goes to reunions of their fighting unit because something about the bonds that they formed during

the strife of warfare is unique and irreplaceable. That person's dedication is an appraisal of something of great value, something to treasure. (3) Surely most of us know someone— we may even *be* someone— who discovered the Sonoran desert and moved here— sometimes leaving behind important connections back east because they felt a passion for the peace and beauty and drama of our desert. Their commitment is an appraisal of something of great value, something to treasure.

Now if you are a part of this congregation (Dove of Peace) or some other faith community, you may have realized that different kinds of people are committed to that faith community because they have found something valuable in their church or its faith or the religious practices that compels them. Churches are often peculiar places because the treasures that people discover in a place like this or bring to a place like this are sometimes peculiar. They are treasures that might look like junk to an outsider. *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.* To the eyes of an outsider, it's an empty field. But the field has hidden treasure.

So, just as someone reads the novels of Jane Austen and finds great purpose and depth, someone in a church might have discovered a hymn or a set of Christmas carols or organ music or handbell music that is a treasure that they are committed to.

Just as a war veteran stays connected to their fighting unit from a war many decades ago, some people treasure a faith community because it connects them to their ancestors, to the shared values and traditions of their grandparents and others. Things that they hope to pass on to their children and to the future.

Just as some people visit the Sonoran desert and find that it speaks to them, some people feel God speaking to them in the beauty of a church building, or in the words of a scripture or in the wisdom of the community's elders.

And Jesus seems to acknowledge the role and importance of religion— the role and importance of faith communities like this one— in helping people to discover the kingdom of heaven, and in cultivating the growth of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus wraps up this whole chapter of parables— today's parables, last week's parable, the week before last week's parable— he wraps up with these words. *'Have you understood all this?'* *They answered, 'Yes.'* *And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'* When Jesus says "scribe," he is talking about a broad class of religious authorities that dealt with all kinds of religious matters in every part of life. There were good scribes and bad scribes, conservative scribes and liberal scribes. All scribes were literate, and so they had significant power over the illiterate masses. And because they were literate, they were the keepers of scriptures. After saying so much about the kingdom of heaven, Jesus now speaks about the scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven. In other words, Jesus is talking about religion.

And he compares the scribe to a person with a vast estate. With many treasures within that estate. And out of that treasure, he brings out, Jesus says, “what is new and what is old.”

And I think that is a very fitting description of a faith community like ours. Where many of us have invested ourselves in this community because of what we treasure here. Over generations, things in our congregation have captivated and compelled many hearts and minds. That is the old treasure.

The important work of a community like ours is to include both the old and the new. The things which have been appraised and treasured in the past. And the things which will be appraised and treasured in the future. Our community is centered in the notion of God’s grace. But that grace, that treasure, is experienced in many different ways. Some of those ways look to the past. Others look to the future. Jesus says that the scribe of the kingdom of heaven– the religious community that is properly oriented– will bring forth from its treasures what is new and what is old. Jesus does not pit one against the other. Because grace is experienced in many ways. One person may experience it in music. And another person may experience it in silence. One person may find it in the experience of comfort and security. Another person may find it in the experience of challenge and adversity. The scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven does not limit God’s work to one kind or the other. *“Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

There was a little congregation that had a beloved member, Ray, who for generations had been what people call “a pillar of the church.” Known for his wisdom, his love, his generosity, his sense of humor. And when Joe died in his eighties, for nearly fifteen years no one would sit in his pew. His absence was felt, and his memory was treasured. Ray was appraised as a treasure of the church, and the way that the little congregation left his pew empty all those years demonstrated its reverence. One Sunday a young family visited. Two parents and a little girl. And they sat right in the spot where Ray had sat for all those generations. And some people wanted to say, *“You can’t sit there!”* But they didn’t. And instead they welcomed the family whole-heartedly and even shared the secrets of the coffee table. You have to get one of Gladys Johnson’s snickerdoodles quick before they’re all gone. Because Gladys Johnson’s snickerdoodles were another highly appraised treasure in that little church. So that little congregation treasured the life and contributions and memory of its beloved friend, Ray. But it also valued the new treasure of the little girl and her family. *“Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

May God train us to be his scribes for the kingdom of heaven, so that out of all the things entrusted to us, we may appraise them rightly. And may we bring out of our treasure what is new and what is old for the sake of all God’s people and the coming of his kingdom. Amen.