

Gloria Dei Meditation
Rev. Alan Lindal
July 23 & 24, 2011

I Kings 3:5-12
Psalm 119:129-136
Romans 8:26-39
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It seems as if we almost pay a tithe to Cox Cable to receive 148 channels with very little to view or enjoy, but there is one show that usually attracts my attention. People by the thousands throng into a large hall and they bring what they think are treasures to be assessed by the experts. The Antique Roadshow travels from region to region, even making an appearance at Century II several years ago.

The script usually follows a well-worn path. "My great grandmother brought this over from China, where she was a missionary. This has been in the family ever since. It has been on the top shelf of my hutch, surrounded by carnival glass. I thought I would bring this today to see what it was."

"Well, ma'am, this is a late Ming Dynasty vase from the early seventeenth century. It has a unique glazing feature developed during that great period of innovation. Do you have any idea how much it is worth?"

"No, the family story goes that she bought it at a bazaar in Beijing as they left the country before Mao took over. I have no idea."

"Well, at auction this piece could bring anywhere between \$ 100,000 and \$125,000."

The woman proceeds to pass out. The medics are called and across the bottom of the screen the computer clicks in 'Ming Dynasty vase \$100-125,000'.

What is worth having? What is really valuable to us in life? Today's lectionary passages invite us to give value to the reality of God's Kingdom in us and among us, intimate and eternal.

The young King Solomon, early in his reign, had a dream. The scriptures are full of dreams and messages from God to God's people. In this dream, God instructs Solomon to ask for the one thing that he most desires. Solomon's response? Lord, give me a discerning heart that I might govern your people and distinguish between right and wrong. The Lord was pleased. Solomon had not asked for anything of personal gain or fortune, but was seeking that which would equip him to lead others. Solomon knew what was valuable. He sought it and it was granted.

In the epic Psalm 119, the psalmist asked that the Lord would direct his footsteps. It is a simple prayer with much value. The psalms are meant to be prayed. In his book, **Life Together**, German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayer become." It is no mistake that a part of every worship experience incorporates a portion of or an entire psalm. The psalms reorient us Godward. They remind us that what is of value and what will last is God with us and within us.

We come to the passages from the gospel of Matthew. We continue to receive Jesus' teaching by means of parables. In the case of these passages Jesus paints small pictures of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the gospel of Matthew, written for the Jewish community, the term 'Kingdom of Heaven' is used instead of 'Kingdom of God,' because the Jewish community would never utter aloud the word for God, 'Yahweh.' So Matthew has Jesus painting pictures of the Kingdom of Heaven. The mustard seed becomes a plant big enough to give shelter to everything needing it. Birds loved to flock around it and eat the small seeds. Sometimes there were so many birds the plant itself could not be seen. Who would have thought it? And yet it is so.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, a scrap of old dough, carefully kneaded into the flour. When the mixing is finished, the flour is forever changed- not in outward appearance, but in its potential and its purpose. The leavened flour only awaits moisture and it begins to do its work and it grows and becomes the bread which feeds all. Jesus shared these simple pictures of the Kingdom and then he moves toward the question of the Antique Roadshow of his day, "What do you think its worth?"

He then shares two parables of value. A man finds a treasure in a field. The man was looking for a treasure and found it. He buries it in the same field and goes and sells everything he has and buys the field. Umph! He sells everything. What was the treasure worth to the man? Everything.

Everything that he possessed he sold in order to own the treasure. Wow. How valuable was it? It was worth everything he had.

A pearl merchant looking for a wonderful buy, finds the pearl of great price. He knows what its worth. This is his line of work. He knows that he has found a great gem. How much is it worth? Everything that he has.

So what is this treasure that is so valuable that people find their bottom line and liquidate all to have it? For that answer we turn to Paul's great gospel of Jesus Christ- the epistle to the church in Rome. In Romans Paul does not rehearse the life of Jesus, but tells of the meaning of Jesus' life. He paints with broad brushstrokes. He rehearses the work of the law in people's lives. He puts it in the form of an attorney pleading his case before a jury. The first seven chapters of Roman contain all the whereases and the therefores. He lays out his argument in clear, concise legal language and then he comes to his point in the first verse of the eighth chapter. "There is; therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The remainder of the chapter, including the passage read for us today, contains the message of the Kingdom of Heaven with us and within us. We are completely inseparable from the love of God. But what about...? No. But surely that doesn't include...? Yes, it does. But God couldn't love... Yes, God can and God does. We are completely inseparable from the love of God. No matter what happens to us, no matter what the adversity or the trials or the seeming unfairness of life, we are inseparable from the love of God.

The Christian life is not a matter of doing great things for God. That's religion. Christianity is doing great things with God. That is the life of Jesus Christ within us. Nothing can separate from Christ in us. It is a new day. We are forever changed. We may not look different, but we are. We are a new creation. That part of us which sought God is now filled with God's love and purpose. How valuable is that? What is worth? Everything.

I want to go back and visit the two parables concerning the value of the Kingdom. A treasure and a pearl. Both finds cause people to sell everything they have to obtain the real treasure. They gladly give all to possess it. I invite you to imagine God standing before you with a gift- the Kingdom of Heaven- just for you. What will it mean for you if you receive it? Can you receive it or are your arms too full of the things that you value more? Lord, could you just put it on top of all this other stuff, or if I turn around, could you hook it into my belt or perhaps download it onto my I-pod, for convenience sake? You see, I believe it is instructive for us to understand that in both of these parables, everything else disappeared and only the Kingdom remained.

In our house we sometimes have a period of pitching and tossing. The pink Am-Vets bag gets filled, along with many boxes of stuff. In like manner, our lives get cluttered. We hang onto old ways of doing things. We insist on carrying around our grudges, our hurts and wounds. We play the old tapes of injustice or pain. We have even had them changed over to be played on new instruments. But it's the same old stuff. The joy and power of the Kingdom can't get through because of all the clutter. Today as you come to the table of the Kingdom, bring your stuff and leave it before you receive the bread of the Kingdom. Lay your burdens down, Lay them down. Let them fall away. Then take the Kingdom once again. Receive God's gift of life in Jesus. What's it worth? It's worth everything.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.