

St George's Anglican Church Malvern

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost Yr A 27 July 2014

Genesis 29.15-28 Ps 105.1-11 Romans 8.26-39 Matthew 13.44-58

Has it struck you, watching images of the MH 17 wreckage, has it struck you - the appalling contrast between the fields of wheat ready for harvest and the beautiful, tall sunflowers and the charred debris? If ever fields contained treasure and pearls of great price surely it is those fields. And deep down *something* of what Jesus is getting at in those parables in today's gospel is being expressed in the determination to bring home the bodies and find the clues that will satisfy the mind and give a measure of peace to the heart. The urgency with which nations are pouring resources into this task, hints at the urgency and the determination Jesus is talking about.

Hear his words again:

Jesus put before those in the house another parable, '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. He told them another parable, 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.'

Think about that treasure hidden in the field. Someone put it there. In a world without banks, burying treasure was a way to keep it safe. Have you seen the amazing Mildenhall treasure in the British Museum? Someone was ploughing a field in Surrey in the early 1940's and found a hoard of Roman coins and gold and silver tableware. It is now on display as one of the most important and most beautiful examples of Roman metal working in the fourth century.

Normally, whoever owns the field, owns its buried treasure. In Jesus' parable, the finder of the treasure reburies it, and goes and with great joy, sells up everything and buys the field so that the treasure will finally belong to them. It would have been no good simply taking the treasure

away; that would be about selfish gain and no change in the finder's life; no turning away from all that is not treasure; no break with the past. But the finder does renounce what is necessary to possess the treasure. Everything else liquidated for the sake of one field and its contents. Imagine it!

Imagine the pearl merchant scouring the markets, always looking for good pearls to sell, learning all about their qualities over the years, imagining the perfect pearl, the pearl he would give anything to possess to make his fame and his fortune if only he could find it. And then, one day that imagined pearl appears; he finds at last what he has searched for with all his energies. Its value is so important to the merchant that he sells all else that he possesses, so that he will now own is this one pearl and nothing else. Imagine it! Surely he has finished now with trading in pearls; no more searching; no more scrutiny of everything that passes through his hands; just the simple contemplation of the one, gloriously beautiful pearl worth everything else he previously valued.

Before there can be a treasure finder, there must be a treasure hider. Before the fish are gathered in, someone must make a net, back and forward tying the twine to create it, and then cast it widely. All these are images of hidden, unseen growing things finally brought to light.

It's as if Jesus can hardly find enough images to tell us about the importance of finding, of possessing the kingdom of God, the reign of God, God's way for us to live. The treasure lies buried, the pearl has been growing, the fish swim in the depths of the sea; but what use if all of that if it remains out of sight. 'Hidden wisdom, unseen treasure, what use is there in that,' the Hebrews scriptures ask? (Sirach 20.30) And being familiar with them, Jesus' hearers begin to understand.

God's ways, God's kingdom, what in Matthew is always called 'the kingdom of heaven' seems to go almost unnoticed by most people, most of the time. Never mind, it continues to grow unseen, nurtured by God whose purposes are never ultimately thwarted and in the end will be accomplished. 'If you seek understanding like silver, and search for it as hidden treasure' says the book of Proverbs, 'then... you will find the knowledge of God'. (Prov. 2.4)

The hidden treasure, the pearl of great price is the mystery of God giving God's own self to us in Christ Jesus. Understanding and life, these two things are the treasure hidden and found, found and hidden; these are the dynamics of the kingdom's life in our world.

Saint Augustine said of his experience of finding God, the Lord is closer to us than we are to ourselves: "*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*" ("higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self") (*Confessions* III, 6, 11). Augustine's restless heart had sought God in the world and all along God was hidden within, waiting to be found when Augustine was ready to set aside all else to possess and be possessed by God's own life.

God comes into our world, hidden at first in the body and the life of Mary his mother and waits to be discovered by each of us who believing in his name, are 'given power to become children of God'. (Jn 1.12).

Thus we poor, impoverished humans inherit all the treasure committed to Jesus' safeguarding: our humanity restored and God's life shared with us.

The writer to the Ephesian Church put it this way,

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a spirit of wisdom...that you may know... what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and ... the immeasurable greatness of God's power in us who believe, according to the working of God's great might. (Eph. 1)

Jesus had one question for those he spoke with that day: have you understood all this? It was not a test; it was not an accusation; it was the kindest encouragement to fall so in love with God's purposes in Jesus that we give ourselves to becoming living parables in whom others also see God.

Have you understood all this?