

Sermon for July 27th, 2014

Seventh Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As I **said** to you earlier it is **good** to be back here with you this morning.

The time away spent on the **Pine Ridge** reservation was a wonderful experience which you will hear **more** about in the weeks to come when the others return from the rest of their vacation.

You may remember that in the last 2 weeks, as well as today, the gospel readings have been Jesus' parables in the **13th chapter** of Matthew. You may be familiar with some of the parables in this chapter as some of them have been repeated in the Gospels of Mark and Luke as well.

Even though we were **not physically** together in the same place during these past 2 weeks—the places of worship I attended while away had the **same** gospel readings you did; *although*, my thought is that the sermon messages may have been **a bit** different than the ones you heard from Pastor Bullock.

On July 13th the group from here at Eden and I attended a worship service at *Our Lady of the Sioux* Catholic church in **Oglala**, South Dakota. This is a small Catholic Church set on a lovely hill on the **Lakota** reservation. There were about **40** people there. There were a mixture of **mostly** Native Americans and some non-

Indians. The **main** difference in the sermon given there was that the sermon was given by a priest who had been assigned to the reservation for the summer. This priest was from **Nigeria** so his take on the parable of what happens when the farmer goes out to sow his seeds where some fell on **rocky** places, or what happened to the seed that fell upon the **thorns**, or what happened to the seed that fell upon the **good soil** was rather different than even the people there on the reservation might have related to.

Last Sunday I was in **North Dakota** at the churches I served during my internship year. They are congregations in the towns of Cogswell and Oakes. Being in a farming community and hearing a sermon preached about the parable of the enemy coming and sowing weeds among the wheat and the servants asking the owner if they should pull out the weeds and being told to wait until the harvest had a whole different meaning to those people who are involved in a farming lifestyle where keeping weeds out of crops is an **ongoing challenge** than it may have had to us who are **not** involved in the raising of crops as our livelihood.

Different settings, **different** places in our country; yet, the **same** gospel message being preached. It is **all** about God and God's work in our lives and in the world around us no matter where we are.

In our gospel reading for today we heard **5 more** parables. Only 2 of these 5 are repeated **anywhere** else in the bible. The parable of the mustard seed and the

yeast point to the fact that the *kingdom of heaven* may **begin** small, but it is eventual triumph and growth is certain. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. Yet, this small seed has the **potential** of growing into a large shrub/tree which can reach between **6 to 12** feet. Or the parable of the *kingdom of heaven* being like yeast also illustrates growth and transformation as at first it seems as though **nothing** is happening. Those of you who make bread know that with **good yeast** and **patience** the bread will soon rise, swell, and be changed into what it was meant to be—food for our bodies.

What I would like to focus more on this morning, though, is the **next 2 parables** which **only** appear here in Matthew's gospel. They are the parables of the *kingdom of heaven* being like a **treasure** hidden in the field which someone found, hid, then in great joy went and sold all he had and bought the field. And the parable of the *kingdom of heaven* being like the merchant who was in search of fine pearls, on finding one pearl of **great** value he also went and sold **all he had** for the sake of having that precious pearl.

I would like us to think for a moment about **what** treasures are in our own lives. (PAUSE) Possibly you treasure your **family**, your **friends**, your **pets**, your **possessions**—it is not a sin to call your possessions a treasure (unless of course you worship them—but **that** is a sermon for another day). Maybe u treasure your

health, or many other things which **you** could think of that you **may** consider a treasure.

Then the pearl—do you **know** how a pearl is formed? I was not sure exactly so I checked. A pearl begins its life inside an oyster's shell when an **intruder**, such as a grain of sand or a bit of floating food **slips in** between one of the two shells of the oyster. In order to **protect** itself the oyster will quickly begin covering in uninvited visitor with layers of **nacre**—the mineral substance which makes up the oyster's shell. Layer upon layer of nacre coats the intruder until a **beautiful pearl** is formed. Beauty comes from something which was originally perceived as an **intruder**.

This being said I would like us to think for a moment about these **treasures**, these beautiful **pearls**, and what the people in the parables did to have them.

(PAUSE) They went and sold all they had and bought them. Let's imagine this as it relates to **our** walk with God and our **own** relationship with Jesus. Are **we** willing to give up what **we** have for the sake of **all** that God has to give us? When we discover the love and care of God and the promise of God's reign in **all** things, our life is **forever** changed. When God comes first, our lives are different. Our foundations for living are **solid** as the good soil the farmer sowed the seed in, our relationships are **cemented** with the love of God and our destiny is **forever intertwined** with that of Jesus Christ. When **God** comes first, the things of this

world have **less** meaning. The things of this world are **only** for the here and now. The *kingdom of heaven* which Jesus was talking about is not here today and gone tomorrow. It is **eternal**.

On my way home on the plane the other day I was reading this book, “*The Practice of the Presence of God*.” by Brother Lawrence—a **monk** who lived in the 1600’s. **This** is what he writes about God’s treasure, p.32.

At the end of the parables the last 2 weeks we heard Jesus say, “*He who has ears, let him hear.*” And near the end of **today’s** reading he asked his disciples, “*Have you understood all this?*” They answered, “*Yes.*”

God’s **treasure** of love, grace, mercy, and eternal life is ours, the **pearl** of blessings and salvation that God has to freely offer is ours./// Disciples of Jesus Christ here today,” *Have you understood all this?*” (PAUSE) AMEN.