

Matthew 13:44-46
Thanksgiving Eve
Rejoicing in Our Treasure!

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
Pastor Paul Krueger
November 22, 2017

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

It’s been about fifteen years or so since I read Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. I had it assigned at some point in middle school so most of it probably went over my head right then and just about all the rest I’ve forgotten. There is, however, a part that I was reminded of this week, something Robinson Crusoe did that might be a useful exercise for all of us, and especially this week as we celebrate Thanksgiving.

Being stranded on a deserted island had not been easy for him. He wasn’t a skilled craftsman and he didn’t have an abundance of tools so certain tasks, like building a home to live in, took a long time to complete as he learned through trial, error, and innovation. But he recognized that in addition to his limited skill-set there was something else impeding his work—the melancholy and despondent thoughts that were occupying his mind.

So he made a list of his state of affairs documenting both the evil and the good of his situation. For instance, while he had been cast on a desolate island with no hope of rescue, he was still alive and hadn’t been drowned like everyone else on his ship. While he didn’t have much in the way of clothing, he was in a warm climate and didn’t have much need for clothing anyway. And while he didn’t have weapons to defend himself with, there didn’t seem to be anyone or anything on the island he would need to defend himself against.

We don’t usually have much of a problem at compiling lists of the evils that befall us. Gripping and complaining come all too naturally to us, don’t they? Finding the good, even in unpleasant or evil situations, and giving thanks for it can take a little more prodding. This morning with the temps down in the thirties and the wind was whipping in my face, I wasn’t thinking thankful thoughts on the way out to my car.

Cold and wind make for an unpleasant combination, but they also helped me to think about some of the blessings that I have: clothing and a thick jacket to take the bite out of the wind; a home, a car, and an office that shelter me from weather; climate control systems in all of those places that allow me at the touch of a button or crank of a dial to set the temperature to whatever is most comfortable to me. If we take the weather outside and use it as a reminder for the things we have been blessed with rather than as fodder for our grumblings and complaints we would have all kinds of opportunities to be grateful.

Food seems to be another bone of contention at times, doesn’t it? It’s too hot, it’s too cold, it’s too bland, it’s too spicy, there are items on my plate that are touching that should not ever touch. But what if instead we took each meal as an opportunity to give thanks that we have food. That we have jobs that provide us with the means to buy food. That the food provides our bodies with the strength to work and to heal. And think of all the other blessings we have when it comes to health... doctors and

medicine and gyms and all manner of things to help keep our bodies in fine condition and then at the end of the day a bed to lie down on for rest in the house with the climate control.

For every “bad” thing out there that we like to complain about—whether it’s going back to work or school on Mondays, waiting in lines at supermarkets and the drive-throughs, waking up in the morning, anything having to do with the government, or whatever it is—I’m sure we could come up with a whole list of things directly related to those items that are cause to be grateful and give thanks.

Acknowledging the “bad” things with the right kind of mindset can actually help us to value the gifts we do have for what they’re worth and develop an appropriate attitude to reflect the value of those gifts.

It works with all the bad or evil things even if (and especially when) we take it to the extreme. What is the worst thing that you have to deal with, the biggest problem that you have? Isn’t it sin? Maybe you had thought of something different, but I think I can make the argument from God’s Word that sin is worse. It’s worse because the consequences of sin are eternal. Sin separates us from God it removes us from God’s plan for our eternal good. If I am sinful, and I am, then that means I do not deserve God’s continued providence because I have rebelled against Him, it means that I don’t deserve the life He’s given me because in living to serve myself rather than Him, I have failed in accomplishing the very purpose of my existence. If we’re sinful, and we are, then we deserve to have God and all His love and blessings stripped away from us forever.

So yeah, sin is definitely our biggest problem. And there isn’t any way we can spin it to give it a silver lining. No amount of “pros” are going to be able to balance out the “cons” when the list of “cons” includes suffering in hell for all eternity.

Now if sin is our biggest problem, then it stands to reason that the solution God provides for the problem of sin is the greatest treasure that we have. And that’s the point of the two little parables we heard from Jesus in our Gospel lesson: ⁴⁴ **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”** ⁴⁵ **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.”** ⁴⁶ **When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.**

The point Jesus wants us to take away from those two little parables is that the kingdom of heaven is of great worth. How much worth? Well in both of the stories the man who discovered the treasure gave up everything he had in order to obtain it. So the kingdom of heaven is worth more than everything else we have! The kingdom of heaven is worth the cost whatever it may be. But what exactly is the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God? It’s the number one topic of Jesus’ teachings; it’s a phrase we hear over and over again in the Gospels, but what does it mean?

If we take a look at all of Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God, the conclusion we come to is that rather than a physical realm or location, the kingdom of God refers to the ruling activity of God. It is His active work in human history through Jesus to redeem humans from sin and its terrible consequences. In other words, the kingdom of God is the saving work of Jesus. It began with His life and death and resurrection and it continues through their proclamation in Word and Sacrament.

There is no greater gift that we have received, no greater treasure that we can share, than the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ. So when we see the damage of sin in this world rather than dwelling there, we turn to the majesty of God’s grace. When we sin rather than wallowing in the misery of our guilt, we turn from our sin to our Savior in repentance trusting in His mercy for forgiveness from our sins.

Robinson Crusoe knew that if he could stop thinking about how bad his situation was and start focusing on the blessings he had, it would free up his mind to accomplish those things he needed to get

done. When you and I discover the incredible value of God's kingdom and the spiritual blessings it entails, the same thing happens for us. When in faith we see Jesus and His saving work on our behalf as the greatest treasure of all, then we can evaluate everything else in our lives. Anything that threatens to hurt our relationship with God we get rid of and we fill our lives instead with things and activities and people that support our position in God's kingdom and our work at expanding that kingdom.

We live our lives in a manner that shows thanks to the God who has given us the greatest treasure of all. Happy Thanksgiving.

Amen.