

Season after **PENTECOST**

Prayers

In peace and joy and in obedience to God's gracious command and invitation, let us pray to the Lord.

Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and love, that, receiving what You have promised, we may love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 125 (antiphon v. 2)

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

Romans 8:28-39

Matthew 13:44-52

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 713 *or* 651

Other Hymns – 573 (OT), 696 (OT), 719 (E), 732(E), 554 (G)

That You, O Lord, may open our hearts to prayer and guide us in this holy conversation so that we may know those things for which we ought to pray and seek them according to His grace. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That the Church may prosper, the good news of Jesus Christ go forth unhindered, and the Spirit bring many into the fellowship of the redeemed. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That You would grant to us good and faithful pastors to preach and teach the whole counsel of Your Word, and that we may receive their words with joy and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That we may remember our Baptism into Christ and live boldly in our vocation as Your children no matter the difficulties of this fallen world, within our families, in our neighbourhoods and throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That You would bless our nation and those who govern us, and that we may use the gift of freedom to live holy, upright and godly lives, to the praise of Your glory. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

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That You would bless all lawful occupations and professions, and that we may pursue honesty and virtue in all things. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That Your people may recognize the true treasure of the cross and rejoice in the resurrection, pursuing with all their hearts, minds, bodies and souls the things of Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That the sick may be healed, the troubled granted peace, the grieving comforted and the dying kept in peace, [and especially do we pray for _____,]. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That You would grant us generous hearts so that we may honour You with the worship of our hearts and bring to You offerings that support Your Word and the extension of Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That we may be steadfast and immovable, abiding in Christ and in His Word of truth, and that we would be kept from error and delivered from temptation. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

That You would watch over our comings and goings and deliver us safely into the arms of Your mercy, in the blessed rest of the faithful, to receive with all the dead in Christ the gift of life everlasting. Lord, in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, endless is Your mercy and eternal Your reign. Hear the prayers of Your people who cry to You in their need and who plead to You in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:44-52

"The Priceless Treasure"

One of the saddest fictional stories, and also a story that is very true to human nature, was written by the American novelist, John Steinbeck. In his short story, 'The Pearl,' he writes about a poor Mexican man who provides for his wife and child by diving for pearls. One day he finds the most beautiful pearl in the world, as large as a golf ball, perfectly formed, and with a brilliant lustre. This man, Kino, had found 'the Pearl of the World.'

Unfortunately, this pearl didn't bring Kino and his family the happiness he thought it would. Steinbeck shows the sinful human nature of mankind when he writes: "The essence of pearl mixed with essence of men and a curious dark residue was precipitated. Every man suddenly became related to Kino's pearl, and Kino's pearl went into the dreams, the speculations, the schemes, the plans, the futures, the wishes, the needs, the lusts, the hungers, of everyone, and only one person stood in the way and that was Kino, so that he became curiously every man's enemy." In the end, Kino's enemies burn his house to the ground, and kill his son. As the story closes, Kino comes to the conclusion that his pearl is evil. He goes to the edge of the sea and throws the pearl with all his might back into the ocean.

This very sad story, which gives us a good look at the darker side of human nature, is a reminder of two parables that Jesus tells us today. They are parables that cause us to ask the question: "What do I treasure most in my life?" They are parables in which Jesus speaks of the only treasure that really matters: "The Priceless Treasure."

How do we interpret these parables? One legitimate interpretation would see the man who finds the treasure in the field and the merchant who finds the priceless pearl as Jesus, with the treasure and pearl representing you and me. So much does our Lord love us that, for the joy of it, He is willing to sacrifice

everything – even His very own life – so that He can give to us free of charge the salvation and eternal life we could not obtain for ourselves.

A more traditional interpretation of these parables sees both the treasure and the pearl referring to our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Our Lord and Saviour died on the cross for your sins and mine. He shed His innocent blood as the payment demanded by a righteous God – a payment that we could never render for our sins. By His suffering and death, Jesus restored a right relationship between us and our heavenly Father, for Scripture tells us: *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* This salvation is the priceless treasure – the pearl of great value of which our Lord speaks in these parables.

How do we obtain this priceless treasure? Some people find it rather unexpectedly. *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up."* Now, it was a common practice in Biblical times to conduct your banking with the ground – you simply buried your money for safe keeping. As a result, people would often go to their grave and take with them the secret of where their wealth was hidden. The man in this parable accidentally finds a similar treasure while digging in a field one day.

Many people have accidentally found *"the priceless treasure"* – salvation through faith in Jesus Christ – without actually looking for it. Remember the Samaritan woman who came to the well to draw water? She came for water but left having received living water – saving faith from Jesus. Remember Zacchaeus, that short man who was so curious about Jesus that he climbed a tree to get a better view? He came curious but he went home satisfied as our Lord joined him and said: *"Today salvation has come to this house."* Or, remember Saul who persecuted the New Testament church? Yet, on the road to Damascus his heart was changed as the Lord Jesus spoke to him, and then turned Saul from a persecutor of the church into Paul a pillar of Christ's church.

There are many people today who find *"the priceless treasure"* without really looking for it. Some may come to church with no other purpose than to please a nagging relative. Others may come within these walls to attend a funeral or a wedding. Or maybe they've heard rumours and are curious about the preacher, the building, or the people. But while they are in God's House, something unexpected – at least to them – happens as they hear the powerful Word of God proclaimed. The Holy Spirit uses that Word to work faith in their hearts. They may come apathetic and uninterested, but they leave with the spark of faith glowing in their hearts . . . with new confidence and hope shining in their lives.

Still others find *"the priceless treasure"* after diligent searching similar to Jesus' parable of *"a merchant in search of fine pearls."* The merchant keeps searching until he finds the ultimate, priceless pearl. Remember Nicodemus who was so troubled that he came to Jesus secretly at night? He came confused but

he went home comforted by Jesus' words: *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so much the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."* Or, remember the Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading the Old Testament Scriptures while riding in his chariot? He didn't understand the meaning of the many prophecies from Isaiah concerning a Saviour until God sent Philip to teach him and ultimately to baptise him.

Today, there are many searching for answers to the meaning of life. 'Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Is this all that there is to this life? What happens when I die?' They are hungry and eager to spend time and money to learn how they can be saved. Many join cults and other religions believing that by being obedient and performing good works will bring them the treasure they so desperately seek.

Some come to the Christian faith through adult Instruction classes or personal counselling times with the pastor. They come having many disillusionments about what is most important in their lives. They want to find that priceless treasure which outweighs all others in value. And when they find this treasure to be Jesus and His death and resurrection for their sinful lives, their 'finding' excludes all human efforts or merit. They begin to see that without the Holy Spirit in their heart, they wouldn't even want the treasure He offers us in faith . . . being more content with the physical treasures of this life. But our heavenly Father loves us enough to plant His treasure of salvation, watering it through Holy Baptism, nurturing it with His powerful Word, strengthening it through the Holy Communion, until finally a person finds it . . . believes it. So Jesus puts it: *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."*

Now, once this man found the treasure hidden in the field, he wasn't merely content to admire the treasure. The merchant wasn't satisfied with simply contemplating the beauty of the pearl. Neither rested until the treasure was theirs. Once the man found the treasure hidden in the field, he quickly buried it again, and *"then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* Likewise, the merchant *"on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."* There wasn't anything dishonest about either of these men in the way they acted. They did what was necessary in order to acquire the priceless treasure, making it their own.

Which brings us to this question: Are we willing to sell all that we have to 'buy' this priceless treasure? To be sure, we don't literally have to sell anything. Rather, we refuse to allow the material things or concerns of this world to keep us from making that priceless treasure our own. In a similar way, we don't literally 'buy' this priceless treasure, for we can't buy our salvation. That was done for sinners like you and me once-and-for-all by our Saviour's death on the cross. It's interesting that when the Bible speaks of 'buying' in a spiritual sense, it refers to buying without money. No money changes hands, and yet the item is now yours. So God says through the prophet Isaiah: *"Come, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."*

According to God's economy, buying means it's free – pure and simple grace . . . His undeserved love shown to us through Christ.

To be sure, making this priceless treasure our own may mean sacrificing or rearranging some priorities. Did you notice that in the parables the man and the merchant joyfully sold all that they had to make the treasure theirs? They didn't regret selling all they had. They didn't go around complaining about the sacrifice they were making; nor did they pity themselves in the face of giving all they owned. Instead, they gave much but they received much more. Their pain of giving was swallowed up in their joy of getting. So we, too, give Christ our service, our obedience, our devotion, our money, all done in love through faith. We offer these meagre things because Christ has given us so much more – free and with no-strings-attached . . . salvation, pardon for all our sins, peace of heart and mind, hope and confidence that His resurrection has gained for us an eternal home in heaven.

Oh, what treasures beyond compare have we received from our gracious God! When it comes to these treasures, may we take the attitude of the apostle Paul: *"Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."* Amen.