

Pentecost 8 [Pr 12] 7/30/17  
Matthew 13:44-52 A

## “HAVE YOU UNDERSTOOD ALL THESE THINGS?”

There is a letter in the Arabic alphabet called "nun." It is equivalent to the English letter "N." This letter has become important of late because it's popping up on the businesses and homes of Christians in the Middle East. The "nun" stands for "Nazarene," signifying a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, a Christian. No, the business and homeowners are not the ones who are putting the letter on their property. Members of the Muslim terrorist group ISIS are the ones putting the "nun" on the businesses and homes of Christians. The "nun" on your home or business means that ISIS has given you an ultimatum and you have one of three choices: 1) Convert to Islam; 2) Flee the country and leave behind all your property and possessions; or, 3) You can die.

So, follower of Jesus of Nazareth, Christian, what would you do if you woke up one morning and found a "nun" on the front door of your home? Oh, I know what you are thinking – "Come on now, Pastor, this is America, that isn't going to happen." OK, I'll grant you that. But, just for a moment, imagine that you are a Christian in the Middle East and a "nun" has been written on your door. What would you do? I ask you that in light of Jesus' words in our parable this morning,

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field ... Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The treasure, the one pearl of great value in Jesus' parable is, of course, the Gospel, the Good News that we are citizens of heaven. This

morning, Jesus is asking you, follower of Jesus of Nazareth, to examine your heart, your life, your soul and mind. Does Jesus mean more to you than anything?

Jesus points out that the Kingdom of heaven is hidden. It is hidden from us because we are dead in sin. And in the folly of our fallen human reason and senses, we fear, love, and trust in all manner of things, rather than Jesus.

Take St. Paul, for example. Saul, as he was known as when we first meet him in the Bible, enjoyed a good life. He was popular, he had a bright future. That is, until God called him to be an apostle. Then, for the sake of the Gospel, Paul endured persecution, prison, beatings, shipwrecks, and finally death itself. This Paul was the man who wrote:

But whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 (Ph 3).

As we live in this world, it is HARD for us to say these same words as Paul. That is because the sinful flesh, the world, and the devil continually war against our hearts of faith. They tempt us to live only for today, to live only for the things we want. Our Lord knows and understands well the daily temptations that we undergo which would have us turn a deaf ear to His words in our lesson. This is why He concludes with the words, "Have you understood all these things?" Well, have you? Have you understood all these things? Our Lord Christ wants us to examine ourselves -- our hearts and our lives.

Years ago, when men went to Alaska to search for gold, some went far into the interior. There, they discovered a miner's hut that was as quiet

as a grave. Entering it, they found the skeletons of two men and a very large quantity of gold on a rough table. There was also a letter that told about their successful hunt for gold. They were so eager to get gold that they ignored the early coming of winter. The more they mined, the more gold they found. Suddenly, one day, a fierce snowstorm struck. They could not escape because of the blizzard. Their food ran out. They became so cold and weakened that they lay down to die -- surrounded by all that gold.

Are you like those two miners? Do you labor for wealth, property, popularity, and the status symbols of this present age? Jesus asks a very important question that all of us must answer, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life" (Mk 8:36)?

Our Lord calls us to examine where our hearts are. Do you measure your worth in life by how much stuff you have? Or, by your baptism into Christ? Is your recreational life taking you away from the Giver of Life? Do you worship the creation or the Creator? Which means more to you? That which you own now or the place in heaven that Christ has prepared for you?

Notice that when the man finds the treasure hidden in the field and when the merchant finds the one pearl of great value, they sell all that they have in order to buy them.

No, to be clear, you cannot buy your way into heaven with money, or good works, or good intentions. Jesus is teaching us the price God paid for you.

Do you ever feel like a number, that you are just a number in this world? I don't know if you caught this in the news this past week, but one Wisconsin company is offering their employees the option -- it is not

mandatory, by the way -- to have a microchip about the size of a grain of rice placed in their hand. That way, when they enter or exit the office building or purchase food in the cafeteria, they can simply wave their hand by the chip reader and “shazam,” business done. And I’m certain some of you would argue this is the future. OK. I call it to your attention this morning because I think it reinforces that we are just a number, a bar code, to the world.

You are not a number to God. When God saw you dead in sin, unable to save yourself, He gave His dearest treasure for you. You know that Good News, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

God sent His greatest treasure to take on human flesh and be born of human flesh. He came to take on your sin, all the times you love the creation more than the Creator, all the times you fear, loved, and trusted in anything and everything besides Jesus. And He carried it all to the cross, where He bled all over that wood and died. Because He did that, you are forgiven.

Everyone wants to find treasure. There are even websites telling us of unclaimed money, just in case your great-uncle died without heirs; that would be your great-uncle with 1,000 oil wells, by the way.

God gives us the treasure of the means of grace. God gives us the treasure and great pearl of His grace hidden under water, and bread and wine, and words. But, we want NEW AND EXCITING, we demand that God must work according to our reason and senses. Water? How can water make me a new creation in Christ? How can bread and wine forgive sin?

We want to see Jesus -- the 900-foot Jesus on Highway 49. We want to see the face of Jesus on my flake of Wheaties. That would be fun, exciting. I don't want to read and listen to the Scriptures. Ba humbug! I want God to talk to me, and by the way, tell me what I want to hear.

That's not the way God works. These are the means God Himself has chosen to make the victory of the cross our very own.

It is no secret that we are in a severe drought. In fact, this past Wednesday, Gov. Burgum declared a drought disaster for nearly the entire state of North Dakota. And we know what a drought means, especially for our ag producers.

But, there is a DROUGHT even worse than a lack of moisture to grow crops for a bountiful harvest. That is the drought when we ignore and despise and do not use the these means of grace.

That is why we receive God's grace in the means He has chosen, that God may do His work in us, so that we may rightly treasure Jesus and His kingdom of heaven as the greatest treasure of all.