

Parable sermon – the Hidden Treasure Matthew 13 v 34-35, 44-45

2 Corinthians 4 v5-12 (Proper 4)

18.6.2006 St Mary's

So which parable is it?

Matthew 13 v 34-35, 44-45

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet:

'I will open my mouth to speak in parables;

I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.'

'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.

'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.'

Were you right?

It is the parable of the hidden treasure. A very short parable. Just one verse in the whole Bible – only to be found in Matthew gospel. Blink and you miss it.

Jesus said: -

'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.

And in a similar vein the parable of the pearl of great price.

And if you were the one to have found the treasure, or indeed the pearl – would you have sold everything that you had to obtain it?

Jesus was very effective in telling stories – but not just any old story. We call them parables.

And what are the distinguishing features of a story for it to deserve the title parable?

At its simplest, the parable is

- a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life,
- which grabs the hearers attention by its vividness or strangeness
- and leaves the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.

(from C. H. Dodd p16 – The Parables of the Kingdom)

I'll come back to this.....

What a parable probably isn't is an allegory whereby every detail is a separate metaphor with significance of its own. Though many have been interpreted as that down the ages eg Augustine had done a detailed decoding of the Good Samaritan – a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and to Augustine the man referred to Adam, Jerusalem the heavenly city, Jericho the moon and a symbol of our mortality and so on!

All very interesting but it is generally thought that these hidden meanings were not in Jesus' original purpose for telling the parable, except perhaps where he explicitly makes them so as in the parable of the sower (though even the interpretation may not have been original to Jesus but added by the church/disciples later. Remember the

Gospels were not written down until 30 –40 years after Jesus' death!).

But back to what a parable is.....

- a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life,

Yes – almost all the parables are drawn from every day life. Sowing seeds, repaying debts, waiting for bridegrooms, searching for pearls, digging for treasure.

- which grabs the hearers attention by its vividness or strangeness

And we all love to hear stories, especially those which grab us because we can immediately relate to them or because there is a twist to the tale.

- and leaves the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.
(from C. H. Dodd p16)

And each and every parable challenge us – we are provoked into judgement - what would we have done?

What makes us comfortable or uncomfortable about the story? Which character can we relate to? Indeed who are we in the story?

And there are no right or wrong answers! We can read a parable one day and feel we are the victim of the crime in the parable of the Good Samaritan and on another day, relate more to the priest hurrying on his way rather than helping (well he was about to take a funeral!).

So – enough of generalities – let's look at our parable window for today.

The parable of the hidden treasure: -

Jesus said: -

‘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.

Do you know where about it is in church – south side – the one nearest the east end! ie there!

Underneath it contains the verse “Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house” (Psalm 26 v8) and is dedicated “To the glory of God and in memory of John Griffin, died 12th .June 1879 aged 81 years.” I wonder whether John particularly liked this parable, or whether his life made it particularly appropriate to him.

And let’s start on the outside and work inwards..... the border – each and every window has a different border – this one is wavy lines with reds and blues.

Then there is the background – again different for every window. A leaf pattern – I thought at first fig leaves but then spotted the distinctive keys of the sycamore tree so sycamore leaves.

And then the detail of the window itself. And here I am very much on my own in terms of interpretation – I’ve looked in several books and guides to the church and none give any detailed description of the windows.

Let’s see what we can spot: -

- well 2 bearded men, one grandly dressed (Left), hat, long layered robes, shoes – the other (right) obviously much poorer – bare headed and bare footed, much shorter robes.

Grand man – holding a rolled up piece of parchment – the other a bag of money. He looks somewhat beseechingly at the grand man – perhaps still not sure whether a deal has been struck. He also has balanced against him a long handled spade (and I’m more than a bit worried about his bare toes!). I think we can be fairly sure that the man on the left is the original owner of the field and the man on the right the one desirous of purchasing it.

But what else – it is clearly fertile land – trees above and greenery below. To the far left is a stone – it took me a while to work out what this could be – at a first glance I thought it was a sack, and then a stone on which one could sit – but further analysis my humble conclusion is that it is a boundary stone – marking the extent of the property of the landowner.

And on the other side there is a peeping out from under a cloth covering, golden glistening treasure. My initial response was this was part of what the right hand man had brought with him in order to purchase the field but on reflection I concluded that this was the treasure he had found and had hidden under the cloth and was hoping to buy with the field. No, not very well hidden (I think I'd have put it back in the ground) but then it couldn't have appeared in the window!

Jesus said: -

‘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.

And where are you in the picture? What challenges you about it? What would provoke you to sell all that you have? Perhaps the most obvious example of this is parents who give up huge amounts for the sake of their children. Every so often the papers carry stories of parents who go to great lengths to fund maybe life-saving treatment for their children which can only be obtained, say, in America. A more material example is people who sell up and emigrate in hope of a better life – whether in the times of the gold rush or the attraction of the wide open spaces of Australia.

But all through history there are people who have made huge material sacrifices in order to serve God in all sorts of different ways. You may indeed be one of them!

Yes, here is a man who sold everything – all that he had .

But maybe you are the seller of the field..... obviously comfortably off and this chap offering you all that he has for your field. Well even all that he has won't make much difference to you and your wealth – and even if the field has some treasure in it? Well, what the heck, you've plenty more. Sometimes we do forget how wealthy we are in world terms – and a bit of this field or that field won't make much difference to us – but it will make a lot of difference to someone else.

Jesus said: -

‘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.

And to what lengths are we prepared to go to discover more of the Kingdom of heaven, to live more fully in it? What are the things, relationships even habits in our lives that we should sell or exchange or change for the

Kingdom of heaven. Is it to us as valuable as a stash of treasure in a field?

The parable does indeed provoke us to make various judgements – and most of them are about ourselves.

St Paul puts a slightly different spin on the subject of treasure (in our epistle) - we *have this treasure in clay jars, so that we may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us*. The treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. So, perhaps it isn't in a field that we need to dig - but deep within ourselves and there discover more of the treasure of the kingdom of heaven.

But perhaps the key word in all this is “joy” Jesus said: -

‘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.

Whether we bring all that we have or just a teaspoonful,
the more we do it with joy, the more we will discover the
treasure that is the kingdom of God.