

## A String of Pearls

### 8 Pentecost A - July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

31 Jesus put before the crowd another parable: "The dominion of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." 33 Jesus told them another parable: "The dominion of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened. 44 "The dominion of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, the dominion of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 "Again, the dominion of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48 when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 51 "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the dominion of heaven is like a householder who brings out of the household treasure what is new and what is old."

*Matthew "strings" together several parables/sayings of Jesus in this passage. In fact, a favorite method of Rabbinic teaching was to share a "String of Pearls." These would be nuggets of wisdom - shared one after another.... sometimes connecting and sometimes standing alone. Each however would be like a window of a house giving the receiver a different insight into Wisdom's mansion. Notice how all of the examples are from everyday life of the people in Jesus' day and the dynamics of how they felt/acted is still true today.*

*In keeping with Matthew's Jewish perspective 2 things stand out: 1) Matthew uses Kingdom of Heaven language instead of Mark's K. of God (perhaps because Jews considered the name of God so holy it shouldn't even be used in everyday parlance); 2) An eschatological (end-times) judgment reference to give hope to a people living under oppressive Roman rule. This reference is meant to instill hope/encouragement to remain faithful/close to the relationship with God, not a fear of damnation....that way*

it remains **Grace centered (undeserved love from God) not based on my decision to accept/follow/obey the demands of a judgmentally oriented God (Decisional Theology – as in to accept Jesus as your Lord/Savior; to surrender or give over your life to God, etc).**

- **Mustard Seed** – Incredible life-giving things can grow from the smallest of God's presence shared through our lives.
- **Yeast** – Even that which is often thought as “bad” can enrich life in order to make it grow.
- **Treasure** – Uncovering life's meaning even by accident can change everything and alter our life – where we live, work, find meaning.
- **Pearl** - Finding life's real treasures is worth giving up ALL of our old Ideas, Attitudes, Behaviors, etc.
- **Net full of Fish** – Hauling in God's blessings means reevaluating what defines good/bad in life and trusting that under the surface of life -- blessings are in abundance and are there to be received.

**1** Jesus is clear that God's presence/blessings are to be found in everyday life – where are you finding your understanding of God's “dominion” in your life these days? How is that altering your perceptions and attitudes toward the world, others and meaning in life esp. in this Covid-19 chapter?

**2** The parables all talk of growth, goodness, life flourishing, priorities changed because of these insights/experiences that are available to those who seek God. Have you experienced God/Faith that way? If not, what needs to happen that will make that possible for you? What is a next step of faith development for you? What experience did you have in the last year that prompted any growth like this? Why or Why not?

**3** When was the last time you spent time “bringing out the household treasure that is new and that is old.” What does this mean for you? Old picture albums....old relationships.... basic truths of life.....new insights to how/why people think and act as they do?.....new understandings and experiences that have led you to be more patient, gracious, kind and generous?