

17th Sunday in Ordinary; Year A

Some of you may remember a popular song titled “I Am Glad There Is You.” In that song there was a line that went like this: “In this world of overrated pleasures and underrated treasures, I am glad there is you.”

I like that line because it describes our world and us so accurately. Isn't that what we do so much of the time - overrate our pleasures and underrate our treasures? The man who goes for a weekend fling, knowing that he could lose his wife's trust and his children's respect - what is he doing? He is risking a treasure on a pleasure, underrating one and overrating the other. Perhaps, we may not be guilty of that specific thing, but there are ways in which we all make this mistake.

Jesus was well aware of this tendency in humans and addressed this issue in two brief parables - one about a man who found a buried treasure, and the other about a man who found a valuable pearl. Each sold all that he had in order to purchase his discovery.

First of all, these parables suggest to me that life's true treasures are usually found in doing of daily duties. That man who discovered the buried treasure - I seriously doubt he was a dreamer with a pirates' map,

going from place to place, hoping to strike it rich. We are not told this, but I think he was a farm hand, plowing that field. He was just doing the things he had been hired to do, when suddenly there was the clang of steel on steel. He pushed aside the dirt, and there it was. In doing of his daily duties, he had found a buried treasure.

We know for sure about the man who found the one really valuable pearl. He was a merchant. Buying and selling was his business. He spent his time searching for fine pearls. And one day, while he was doing the same thing that he did every day, he found one really valuable pearl, more beautiful than any he had ever seen in his entire life. If he will never do his job, the probability is, he would never have found it. I think our Lord was telling us that life's true treasures are usually discovered by people who devote themselves to their everyday duties and responsibilities. Of course, most of us don't believe that. We keep thinking that the real treasure is out there somewhere. And if we were not tied down to this boring job and if we were not loaded with these family responsibilities, then we could go look for it.

Edna Vincent Millay wrote some lines that capture a very familiar mood. She said: “Life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse. And tomorrow, and tomorrow - there is this same little street, this same little house.”

Don’t we sometimes feel that way? Same old job, same old street, same old house, same old people, and same old responsibilities - surely life must be going on somewhere else, and we are missing it. We can’t even go look for it, because we stuck where nothing interesting ever happens. Jesus was dealing with those feelings when he told a story about a man who found buried treasure while plowing a field, and another story about a merchant who, in the everyday doing of his trade, came across a priceless pearl. If you and I ever find the true treasure of life, in all probability, it will happen right here. If we don’t find it here, we may never find it anywhere, because we probably would not recognize it if we saw it.

The second thing these stories suggest to me is that life’s true treasure usually comes as a surprise. We are surprised by where and when we find them, and we are surprised at what they are. Jesus defined true

treasure as “the reign of God;” but don’t make that into something high-flown, mystical, and far-removed. Our Lord discovered this Kingdom of God in some rather ordinary people and things. Once he focused the attention of his disciples on a little child and said to them: “Whoever makes himself lowly, becoming like this child, is of greatest importance in that heavenly kingdom.” Think about that. Jesus found the real riches of life in the lowliness of a little child, while so many people are looking for a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. True treasure so often carries this element of surprise. We are looking for something big; we find something small. We think it is far away, but we find it near at hand.

A man spends his days and years doing his job, paying his bills, loving his wife, playing with his children, supporting his church, and befriending his neighbors. He does not think much about it; he is just living his life. Then one day it occurs to him that he is loved, trusted, respected and depended upon. Suddenly he realizes that he is a rich man and did not even know. He has found life’s true treasure right in his own backyard. The same kind of thing can happen to a wife and a mother and to young people, as well. Whether we are single or married, young or

old, whenever we find the true treasures of life, we are usually surprised at where we find them and what they are.

Before we finish, consider this one last thought: the true treasures of life are almost always costly, not in terms of money, but in terms of self. In the two parables, both men sold all that they had in order to buy the thing that they wanted. Jesus, of course, was speaking symbolically. The really valuable things in this life can't be bought with any amount of money. They can be ours only if we are willing to invest a part of ourselves in the purchase of them.

So, what do we want in life? Strong character that can stand the storms? A good home where love is always waiting? Friends who would trust us with anything they have? Are these the things we want from life? If so, they are costly. No amount of money can buy them. They must be purchased with our very life. We have to invest ourselves in them. That is how it is with true treasures. They are never cheap; otherwise they would not be treasures. **Amen.**