

Treasures Old and New

Have you understood all these things? They said to Him, Yes. And He said to them, Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. (Matthew 13:51, 52)

Did you know we are experiencing a shortage? No, not the kind that involves toilet paper and rice-a-roni, or the hoarding of certain grocery items. The recent shortage has to do with the treasury. Coins are in high demand, and merchants are asking their patrons to give exact change as a way of relieving the dilemma. Who knew that pocket change that we so often think of a leftover nuisance could be so valuable and sought after? Treasures are in the eye of the beholder.

Jesus makes a valuable comparison between the scribe that is employed in the spiritual realms of heaven with the more earthly master placed in charge of the mundane house. The role of a scribe is that of transcription. Before the days of xerox, trained Hebrew men would handwrite scrolls onto parchment. The process was tedious and time consuming, but these men were very meticulous and deliberate about their work. They were trained to keep the treasures of heaven alive and in the hands of rabbis and priests who in turn preached and taught God's people of old.

With today's modern conveniences, you might think that scribes are obsolete. You can google most anything and get an answer. Keyboards and touch screens have taken the place of parchment and ink quills. Lutheran Bible translators are probably the closest resemblance we have to the folks Jesus mentions in the text. They do an awful lot to keep the living Word in the hands and in the ears of cultures all over the world. Another organization on the radar is Lutheran Heritage Foundation that does a similar thing with catechisms and distinctly Lutheran confessional documents.

Jesus finds a way to make treasures available to you. He uses these parables in Matthew 13 to get you thinking in spiritual terms while using earthly object lessons. One treasure is hidden in a field which is found and covered up again. The treasure a certain man discovers is of such immense value that it requires the buyer to sacrifice everything he has in order to obtain it. Since the treasure has been hidden in the field, it's not a new thing. It has been lying there for some time in hiding. Now that it has been unearthed, its idle value can be utilized and pressed into service. The status of the old treasure has taken on new importance in the possession of the man who now owns it.

This is true also of us who have the treasure of faith in Jesus Christ. Though long hidden beneath the guise of prophecy foretold and promises outstanding, now we have come to recognize in Jesus the fulfilment of our salvation for the new life of the world. The book of Hebrews puts it forth like this: "In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets, but now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2a). What might this old/new thing look like? What treasures of faith in Jesus Christ remain ours via the work of God's scribes?

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:16-18). Reconciliation has come about by way of great cost—a cost not imposed on us but on Christ our Redeemer. The man in the parable goes and sells all he has to buy that field. Jesus spent Himself entirely on the cross for you, in order that you might be His new and treasured possession of eternity. And He does this old/new thing in His joy. All this is from God, not from us.

Consider another old/new treasure that is yours by faith: "Drink of it, all of you," Jesus said, "for this is My blood of the new covenant, which has been poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:27b-29). The old Passover of priceless worth is rediscovered anew and given its greater meaning and purpose when Jesus attaches it to His own blood in the new covenant. He pours Himself out for the forgiveness of your sins in this most holy treasure. Holy Communion is indeed a pearl of great price. Treasure it! For Jesus gave everything He had and is to make it so for you in the kingdom of heaven. God be praised for our Merchant Jesus Christ!

Of course we can't have a sermon about old and new treasure without making mention of Holy Baptism. The master scribe St. Paul writes, "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). The bit about burial and resurrection corresponds well to what Jesus teaches us today about hidden treasure buried in the field only to be dug up and discovered in joy. This is our joy too as people of God baptized and consequently walking in newness of life. God has seen fit to bury our sins with Jesus and raise us again by justification. This is by grace—what the kingdom of heaven looks like, what the communion of saints resemble on account of Jesus' own death and resurrection.

Something ought to be said about the third point of comparison Jesus teaches us in the text. So we turn now to His old/new treasure regarding the catch of fish via the net. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad" (Matthew 13:47, 48). What does this mean? Consider yourselves caught in the net. Captured by the Gospel, you no longer have the freedoms you once had to swim wherever you please. God has gathered you unto Himself through the Word. You have heard, and so you believe. The real question is whether in the sorting on Judgment Day you end up in the container of the good or the throwing out of the bad. The bad fish are good for anything but evil. Their place is predetermined now and the kingdom of heaven has no place for them. So don't end up a bad fish! It is far better for you in the sea of life to be a fish of the heavenly Father. The sea is a deep and wide place with lots of hiding places, but the net is far sweeping and indiscriminate in its scope. You cannot bury yourself in the coral reef or out swim the reaches of the net. You will be sorted and judged accordingly.

Left to your own worldly riches and pleasures, you stand already judged. By your own meager merits, you are separated from God and condemned according to His Law. In the sea of guilt and righteous judgment, your lot will be a fiery eternity and your food will be sad tears. But you, dear Christian friend, have been purchased by the blood of Jesus. For you He has come among us in joy, selling everything He had by right to purchase and redeem you. The Creed informs us that He descended to hell—to that place reserved for us of fiery pain and endless teeth gnashing. He went there for you—declaring sound defeat of your enemy, the devil, so that you might be His own and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteous, innocence, and blessedness.

While the unrighteous are judged and separated apart from God by their own unrighteous deeds, the righteous are set apart and made holy by the blood of the Lamb. The scribe Moses describes the old made new when he writes by holy inspiration of you: "You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:7). That chosen act of God is not because you were somehow more lovable or more desirable than the other fish of the sea. "By grace you have been saved through faith," we confess along with St. Paul, "and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ. Receiving Him now through mere bread and wine, His body and His blood is given you for the forgiveness of all your sins. The Master of the house has brought out this old/new treasures for you through the pen of His scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven. He who has ears let him hear.

It's hard to fathom how a coin shortage could be possible when so many people store up their loose pocket change in mason jars. But then again, who anticipated on New Year's Eve that we'd have a year 2020 like this one? The U.S. Treasury is more than capable of correcting the deficiency. Thankfully, we have treasures not kept in mason jars or minted by the federal reserve. We have the lasting treasure of Jesus who always gives us everything He has for our salvation to eternity. Amen.