

Following on from the parable of the sower last week we have, this week, two parables in which Jesus is seen as the great teacher, using everyday examples to demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like. These examples are all based round items or topics his hearers would be familiar with – farming, buying and selling pearls, money etc which makes it easier for them to apply them to their own everyday lives.

The selected reading is very short – 2 verses.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it,
he hid it*

again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

*⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine
pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything
he had and bought it.*

these descriptions are short on detail, but the images are down-to-earth and concrete and are packed with meaning for us as Christians. I wonder whether these verses are about awakening the imagination, of inviting people to see the extraordinary among the ordinary. This is the world of promise and potential rather than rigid rules and regulations. Perhaps Jesus is teaching that the kingdom is not in the hands of the religious rulers – the scribes and Pharisees – but that we all have a part to play. Perhaps he wants us to understand that the small or insignificant can become vital and world-changing.

If we look at these two parables, in context, we will recall that they were written at the time when Jesus was gathering his followers around him, most probably in the early part of his ministry. There were many people who heard his teaching and had to decide if they would follow him or not. They knew that if they did follow him there would be big changes in their lives. They needed to consider - was it wise to follow him or foolish? Here in these two parables Jesus was helping the people to make their decisions. He was saying to them, if you decide to follow me, you will gain more than you will lose.

These two parables emphasise the overwhelming riches of the kingdom of heaven. In the first, someone stumbles on hidden treasure; once again the kingdom is not obvious, but its value is such that anyone who discovers it will exchange everything to possess it. In the second, a merchant is searching for

pearls. The kingdom is discovered in very different ways – in one case by chance, in the other by searching for it. But however, it is found, the crucial message is this: it is worth sacrificing everything else for its sake.

So, does finding the kingdom of heaven mean that we have to give things up, to live by different values, to have different objectives, to use our time, our money and our gifts differently, to be separate? Or does it offer us an insight into the big picture, God at work in ways that sometimes confound our understanding or are beyond the narrow boundaries we would impose? The idea that we might give up everything we have in order to follow Jesus can seem impossible. To many people today, that is unthinkable. but that's what Jesus is saying - If you follow me, I will give you the best kind of life anyone can live.

The kingdom of heaven **is** to be found and discovered, but it is also a priceless gift to be **welcomed and nurtured**. The life that we are offered by God **is** real treasure, being a Christian is about **enjoying** the best kind of life. It is the best life. It is indeed life in all its fullness.

We **know** that we belong to God through Jesus Christ, and that in spite of our failings we are accepted for who **we are** by him. This is the life which we are offered if we follow him. But it isn't always easy, we all know from bitter experience. It is a life in which we share both the happiness and sufferings of other people. There is pain and there is joy.

This life can be found in the ordinary and the everyday. Many times, we are like that farmer and the pearl trader, God offers us the opportunities to have a fuller life, but it comes at a cost. It's then that we have to decide whether we have the faith and courage to seize the opportunities that he is giving us or whether we don't have the courage to take the opportunity. If we do, we will find that what God has to offer us is part of the full and eternal life he wants us to enjoy.

These two short parables are leading us to a deeper understanding of what the kingdom of God is like. Perhaps one of these parables appeals to you more than the others. Perhaps it will reveal the kingdom that little bit more deeply, and will resonate more with you as an individual than the other.

These narratives would have made perfect sense to the original hearers — and still do to us today! This Gospel today provides us with a great opportunity to pause, to reflect, to ponder and to ask ourselves, what it is we truly treasure?