“***A Pearl of Great Value***” by S. Finlan, for The First Church, July 26, 2020

**Matthew 13:33, 44–46**

33He told them another parable: “The kingdom 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 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.

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

There are three of the shorter parables here. Jesus loved to use these stories to communicate his message. People tend to listen to stories, not putting up a lot of resistance right at the start. The first parable seems to picture the way that the kingdom expands, like bread expands when it has been leavened. He also draws attention to the fact that the leaven is penetrating the whole loaf, which is what we hope the leaven of truth and faith will do to the human race. The kneading tells us that it takes effort, it takes time before results are seen; we have to be patient. So this is a very rich and important parable, since it shows how the message of Jesus will change the world: through gradual permeation that leads to a rising effect.

It also implies that the effects take place at a later time than the work. Every kind action creates ripples that carry the message forth. We may never know the outcome of our kindness, but in faith we do good deeds, for we trust that all goodness is preserved; it becomes treasure in heaven. We store up this treasure not in order to count it later but to trust that our kind words have meaning and our spiritual gifts have real value. The results are beyond our knowing, and they will probably be beyond our imagining.

The next two parables concern a choice that a person makes, and the two are similar. The unnamed protagonist finds either a hidden treasure or a valuable pearl, goes and sells all he has so he may obtain the treasure. It shows what a person really would do, who made a surprising find and really recognized its value.

These are very realistic parables. They show something that often happens in people’s lives. They find something of great value and they decide to go “all in,” to invest all their hope and money in that thing. It is something that often happens on the *material* level, but since this is a likeness to the kingdom of heaven, it has to be a metaphor for something on the spiritual level. It seems to stand for an instance where we invest hope and trust in something of supreme spiritual value. I think it pictures how we should react when we find the message of the gospel; we should go and invest all our hope in Jesus. We should sell everything we have, symbolically speaking, and put it all into the gospel.

The message of God’s love and watchcare is a treasure or a pearl of great value. When we discover it, we should *recognize* it as treasure, and should go *all in* on it. That is what Simeon and Anna did when they recognized the infant Jesus as being the promised Messiah. Simeon says he can now be dismissed in peace because his “eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:30). Anna, in the Temple courts, “began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). These two poets were both looking for the redemption of Israel, and, because of a revelation to their hearts, they recognized the baby Jesus as the promised deliverer. Anna was 84, and yet she became an energetic preacher for Jesus near the end of her life and the *beginning* of his life. She and Simeon went all in, and they found a special joy here in their senior years.

Wholeheartedness yields spiritual results. Some of the recipients of Jesus’ healing show the same wholehearted faith. And we see it in the Apostle Thomas, who at one point said “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). He was willing to bet everything on Jesus. His faith-experience had grown within him, and he trusted God to guide him.

What happens when you go all in on Jesus? You experience his love, and you realize God the Father’s love is of the same quality. You gain confidence in God. Now, people who think that there is nothing beyond what is seen with the eyes, that the material level is all that exists, may be led to despair. How much deeper and more insightful is what the eye of spiritual faith can see and feel.

You will find that you are not drawn into the narratives of negativity and despair that become so common among people. You find that you can’t help but share some of Jesus’ optimism about human possibility. As Jesus affirmed the good will of human fathers, saying they would not give a stone to a child who asked for bread (Matt 7:9), so we are inclined to affirm the good will of fathers and mothers. Jesus *knew* people, and he knows the real you that you want to become. There should be no fear of becoming the spiritual being that you are meant to be. The pearl of great value, when you encounter it, will *feel* right.

Loving Jesus tends to move us to affirm the goodness inside people. We need not become hopelessly naïve or starry-eyed. But the love of Jesus will move us toward affirming people’s spiritual potential. Of course, it is heartbreaking when people fail to resist narrow thinking, when they act like speed bumps to the people around them, but we know that they *could* resist the selfishness and materialism that dominates so much of human conversation. And if they are touched by love, they *can* reflect the Spiritual Parent in their earthly loving.

Pray that they learn to reflect the Spiritual Parent who loves them. Pray that some of the leaven gets into them. There is enough leaven to go around, and to transform everybody.