

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, July 30, 2023

The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Festal Eucharist

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for Children and Family Ministries and School Chaplain*

on

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-53

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The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

There was once a boy who longed to have a metal detector of his own. Imagine his delight when on his 11th birthday he was presented with just that, a dream gift. He would take the detector to the beach, and on vacation, hoping to find treasure, and nothing would give him more thrill and then this magic machine would light up and buzz loudly, prompting him to dig deep often to find 'treasure' in the form of a metal bottle cap, or something of insignificance. However, this did not deter him from pursuing this somewhat compulsive hobby in his vigorous quest for golden treasure, like a character from the 1960's caper, it's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World which is all about a group of strangers fighting tooth and nail in a race to unearth a million dollars.

He continued to uncover worthless objects, that is until the day he literally struck gold. Having discovered a likely treasure chest, a field in the English countryside, he proceeded to strike a deal with a local farmer with whom he guaranteed 'I'm onto something. Whatever I find I will share with you.'

However, as the story played out, he did not fulfill his promise or declare his findings, not only of ten ancient gold coins, but went on to sell what was legally national treasure. This story subsequently hit the national headlines. It was no longer a tale of someone seeking or finding, but a story rooted in greed, and one with a joyless ending resulting in this case, in the loss of his job, reputation and one which led him to prison.

This happens to be a fairly recent true story, and like many a fable or cautionary tale is one in which we can readily align ourselves with the characters, predict the plot, and attempt to unravel the moral dilemma it presents. This story stands in contrast our honest treasure seeker in today's gospel, who dutifully sold all he had in order to buy a field laden with treasure, in a parable which points us to the Kingdom of God.

Storytelling and especially parable sharing was central to Jesus' ministry and at the heart of our trilogy of Gospel readings over the last few weeks. Jesus' myriad of references to fields, seeds and other agricultural imagery, to the sea and treasure, just as we heard today, also commends us to seek and find, to uncover what is hidden and buried, with all our heart, in order to reveal lasting treasures of the kingdom, and in so doing be surprised by joy.

I expect we all have hidden treasure in our lives, things that we keep for a rainy day, like the forgotten box I recently uncovered under my closet. Inside was a wedding gift belonging to my grandparents', a fragile, bone china tea set, a treasure which they, and neither I have ever used, and I had also completely forgotten about. Out of sight and out of mind this gift was rendered useless. Unlike the treasure of the kingdom which is not

to be hidden but put to good use and to be shared, and some may say that gesture of joyful sharing is a treasure in itself.

You may recall at the end of the story of Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*, God asks for the two treasures of the city to be brought to him. One is a broken heart of the Happy Prince, who had once been a jewel adorned statue in the city, who had given away the precious gems and gold from his very being to the poor of the city, and the second treasure was the dead swallow lying at his feet, who had given up his life distributing that very treasure to those in need.

I wonder, What type of treasure do you seek and also seek to be?

Treasure, and what we value, comes in many forms, and of course not only refers to material goods and possessions for there are some things as well as people, we don't really value until they are gone. I will always remember in the early weeks of the lockdown when a reflection appeared in the New York Times, New York, We miss you, wherein the author went on to recall multiple elements of the city which we had previously moaned about: the hustle and bustle, the crowded subways, the familiar overload of senses, the distinctive smells, the noise of the sirens. All that we had taken for granted, all that we missed spoke of life.

Treasure too might be people who we hold dear to us and that help guide our lives. However sometimes we are so preoccupied that we do not acknowledge how important others are to us, or recognize the time, talents and treasures both of and in others, or even those buried within ourselves.

Just imagine if all the choristers here today, had buried away rather than shared their musical gifts, how diminished would our lives and indeed theirs would be without their song. In your music God has been glorified this week and in it we too have found joy. Thank you.

I wonder, what treasures are lying hidden within you? And indeed, within each one of us in this parish as we prepare for our Bicentennial? As we not only delve into the archives, uncover old photos, and even our floors, share memories, remember those who have gone before us and too welcome in new people, and a new era bringing our treasure that is old and new.

Today I am particularly remembering Joanie Saunders a beloved member of this parish who died earlier this year and whose birthday is today. There was never any doubt about what and who she treasured in her life, judging by the huge number of photographs around her apartment, and how she always truly valued the person she was speaking to or writing to, who was standing in front of. She showed us what it is also to be treasured and seen as precious in the present moment.

We don't know what happened after the joyful, life-changing discovery of today's treasure seeker, but I do know Joanie's life showed us that where faith, hope and love are shared, happiness, blessedness and joy too are found in abundance.

In her weekly unofficial letter to clergy Bishop Mary Glasspool too wrote about seeking, discovering this very joy in abundance, deep within each one of us, and so today I conclude with what she shared,

"Finding the treasure of the kingdom", she says, "is like finding a million dollars in a field, he says, or a priceless jewel. It's like finding something you hated to lose and thought you'd never find again - an old keepsake, a stray sheep, a missing child. When the kingdom of heaven really comes, it's as if the thing that was buried, the thing that you lost and thought you'd never find again is *you*."

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.