

## **Matthew 13:44-50**

So Jesus has been teaching the crowds with parables, but clearly no one gets them, because once they're in the house the disciples come to ask him privately about them. So Jesus explains to the disciples the parables he's already told, and then he tells them new parables. As the disciples struggle to understand what the kingdom of heaven is, Jesus is trying to give them an idea of what it is like. But because the kingdom of heaven is a lot of things, it's easier to paint it with a lot of different stories, until the disciples can see an image of the kingdom of heaven emerge. We're looking now at the three parables of the treasure, the merchant, and the net.

At first glance, it looks like the first two tell the same story (someone finds something of great value and sells everything to get it), and the third one is about something else. But at second glance, it may not be quite so.

In the parable of the treasure, the kingdom of heaven is like the treasure that someone finds in a field. What a find! What joy that worker feels! He sells everything to buy the field, and now he has a field with a treasure in it, and the treasure is the kingdom of heaven. Lucky man!

In the second parable, the kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great value. Oh wait, no! It's like a merchant searching for fine pearls. He finds one of great value, goes to sell everything he has, and now he owns a pearl of great value. This isn't only about one person finding God. But about the whole kingdom of heaven finding a pearl of great value and rejoicing over it!

See the joy that springs from those two parables together, the joy of people finding the kingdom of heaven, and the joy of the kingdom of heaven finding people. Feel the mutual joy of finding, and being found.

But the kingdom of heaven has more than one method for gathering people. Like the merchant, it looks for one fine pearl. And like the net of the third parable, it generously gathers all kinds together as it goes. The image here is one of a dragnet: two boats would go through the water with a net between them, and pick up everything the lake has to offer.

When Matthew writes his gospel at the end of the first century, he's writing for a community that struggles with being church together, with being the kingdom of heaven together. There are Jewish Christians, and Gentile Christians, and tensions and disagreements about who belongs and who doesn't, who is truly righteous and who is not. That feels a little familiar. The church has been struggling with this ever since.

And so, in Matthew's story, Jesus reminds the disciples that they're not the ones who decide who is what. The fish don't sort themselves out, don't decide who belongs in the net and who doesn't. That is the angels' job, at the very end of time.

Until that, let us be reminded of the irrational joy that comes from finding God and being found by God. Let us be reminded of our joy when we found the treasure of the kingdom of heaven. Of our joy, as parts of the kingdom of heaven, of finding a pearl of great value in some of the fishes next to us in the net. Let us stay with that joy today as we worship together.