

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



www.orlaghinthecity.ie

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

26th July 2026

Matt. 13:44 Jesus said to the crowds: “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.

Matt. 13:45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matt. 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 13:51 “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵² And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Here we have three parables or comparisons. In their original form, parables are meant to contain something puzzling or disturbing. Whether or not you think these parables go back to Jesus' own teaching depends on whether you think these are “real” parables or more simply didactic examples with a fairly clear message. The question at the end captures Matthew's own description of himself, trying to hold together the novelty of the Gospel and the lasting value of the Old Testament within the Jewish tradition.

The parable of the net goes back to the fishing metaphor used at the call stories in the Gospels: And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” (Matt 4:19) The particular function of the parable of the net resembles that of two other parables in Matthew, that of the weeds and the wheat (Matt 13) and that of the wedding feast (Matt 19). In all three cases the issue is the tendency of religious groups to exclude the imperfect. This was an issue in the Christian movement once it had “settled down” and become “church”. Matthew's overall teaching on this is both hopeful and theological: hopeful in that now is the time of growth and change and no-one can determine what may happen on the faith journey of another; theological in that he says clearly that we are to leave the assessment firmly in the hands of God.

Chapter 13 fits into Matthew's story in an interesting way. In chs. 5-7, Jesus gave powerful teaching to his followers. In chs. 8-9, we see Jesus powerful in deed. Following on that, chs. 11-12 show a variety of responses to Jesus. In ch. 13, Jesus tries to deconstruct an old world and construct a new one. There are two “audiences”: the crowds (who do not really understand) and the disciples (who begin to understand, albeit falteringly). That is why, in the middle of ch. 13, Jesus turns to his disciples and instructs them directly. This division of response will continue in chs. 14-16, where we witness the widening gap between two communities, no doubt reflecting conditions at the time of writing.

With such a context in mind, we are reminded that we cannot take the parables out of their setting and treat them somehow as generic wisdom. The parables packed a punch in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early church. It is our task to allow them to speak today, in our communities and contexts.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

What does Matthew want the followers of Jesus to know about the kingdom? It is precious - so precious that its discovery requires us to put aside everything else in order to immerse ourselves wholeheartedly in it. We are called to set aside all selfishness and self-interest, all judgement, all our certainties and superior attitudes, and to live the kingdom values of humility, openness and compassion. Jesus emphasises that ‘kingdom people’ bring out of their treasure what is new and what is old.

When did you find ‘hidden treasure’? Maybe you were inspired by a powerful speaker or found peace at a retreat? Perhaps someone offered a word of wisdom that was meant just for you? We remember with gratitude the times we experienced a movement of the heart, a new treasure.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper

We come now to the last three parables of chapter 13 and, as before, they focus on the kingdom of God. It is interesting that Jesus never offered a theological definition of this central theme in his preaching, he simply kept telling stories to illustrate various aspects of it. In the parables told today the emphasis is on how we should respond to the mystery of God's kingdom in the world around us.

In the first parable, someone finds a treasure they were not even looking for; rather in their daily toil they came across it. They recognise it for what it is and realise that they must do everything necessary to take possession of it. Even though there is upheaval it does not compare with the joy the finder experiences.

The second story has a similar theme only this time the person is in search of and finds the pearl of great price and once again everything else must be abandoned as he takes the necessary steps to buy the pearl.

The concluding story is different and deals with two aspects of the mystery of the kingdom that we have already mentioned: it is both a gift and a challenge. The net thrown not the sea catches fish of every kind - meaning that the invitation to the kingdom is universal. Yet there is a process of sorting because we must choose the ways of the kingdom; it contains an element of judgement, for each one must be accountable for their actions.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Have you ever found yourself saying "that was worth it" after giving up something (time, pleasure, money, etc.)? What was the treasure that made the sacrifice worthwhile?
2. The "kingdom of heaven" is when God is really the ruler in our life. What treasures have you obtained when you allow God to be at the centre of your life?
3. In life we gather a lot of things, some good and some bad. The wise person in the kingdom of heaven, knows how to sit down and make decisions on what to keep and what to discard. When have you undertaken that kind of discernment? What have you discarded? What have you retained?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

The kingdom of God is hidden. Many have not yet discovered the grand project God has for a new world. However, it is not an inaccessible mystery. It is hidden in Jesus, in his life and in his message. A Christian community that has not yet discovered the kingdom of God does not know the purpose of its own origin in Jesus.

The discovery of the kingdom of God changes the life of the ones who discover it. Their joy is unmistakable. They have discovered the essence of life, the best Jesus offers, the value that can change their lives. If Christians do not discover the project of Jesus, there will be no joy in the church.

The two main characters in the parables make the same decision: they sell all they have. There is nothing more important than to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Everything else is secondary and relative and must be subordinated to the project of God. The most important decision that we must make in the church and in Christian communities is to rid ourselves of so much that is accidental order to commit ourselves to the kingdom of God, to strip ourselves of what is superfluous, to forget other pursuits, to learn to lose in order to gain in authenticity. If we do this we will be working together for the conversion of the church

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus

"He does not have a shred of bitterness, even after twenty-eight years of prison and abuse and injustice"

Shridath Ramphal, speaking of Nelson Mandela

Lord, we thank you for people of faith; ordinary people like our grandparents or elder in our parish community; or great people like Nelson Mandela.

They have developed an extraordinary serenity in facing their problems.

They are like people who have chanced on a huge treasure that was hidden in a field, who have hidden it again and gone off perfectly happy because they went and bought the field and now they know that have nothing to worry about for the rest of their lives.

Lord, we thank you for conversion experiences: A retreat or a marriage encounter weekend, or meeting someone we knew we could trust.

Up till then we had been living scattered lives, like a juggler trying to keep different pieces in the air all at once, or a merchant forever looking for a pearl more precious than the one he had just bought.

Now we knew that we had found a pearl of such great value that we were willing to go off and sell everything new owned and buy it.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels