

1 Kgs 3:5,7-12 Ps 118:57,72,76-77,127-130, Rm 8:28-30 Mt 13:44-52

Usually in the evening, when I get the opportunity to rest for a few minutes in my sitting room, my eyes are drawn to a beautiful solid silver nativity on the mantel piece. It has striking detail and is very valuable. But this is my 'treasure' not because of its monetary value but for a much more personal reason. I bought it many years ago at a ridiculously low price in one of the many backstreet antique shops in Istanbul. The Muslim seller clearly had no idea of its religious significance or true value. I felt that same joy of discovery that was experienced by the man who found the treasure hidden in the field. Despite a fleeting pang of conscience, I rationalised that the language barrier freed me of any moral responsibility to educate him about its real worth. I left the shop delighted with my find, and even satisfied that I had played some small part in preserving the Christian heritage of Constantinople. (Of course deep down, I accepted that it was a very small compensation for the loss of the city to the Ottomans in 1453).

The meaning of the three parables is seemingly quite simple. The kingdom of God is so valuable, such a 'treasure', that we should be willing to risk or to sacrifice everything in our lives, to acquire it. The dragnet parable, like that of the wheat and the weeds, reminds us that only God can separate good from evil and make any judgment. Our task is to make sure we are caught in that net. It encourages us to accept our own divided natures as the starting point for our journey in faith. It confirms that because we are sinners, the Church is both holy and sinful. This is not a message to depress us, or undermine our commitment, but instead to reassure us that we can feel still supported by God's unlimited, unconditional love.

The second Parable focuses on the merchant rather than the pearl. It suggests that the kingdom involves the act of 'looking for' or 'seeking'. It involves the pursuit of meaning, purpose, and direction in our lives. The Kingdom can be discovered by those genuinely searching.

Not everyone finds it immediately or easily. The Rich Young man went away sad – he had not reached the awareness that commitment to the Kingdom, requires total detachment. He was unable to sell everything in order to have the ultimate treasure. He failed to understand that discipleship means seeing everything else as less important, never central, and even possibly merely chaff.

The richness and depth of meaning of these parables defies easy or simple interpretation. Whilst at one level they suggest the Kingdom is something to be possessed or participated in, there is also a sense that the seeker is possessed or discovered by the Kingdom. In seeking, we allow ourselves to be found. In being found, we are changed. Everyone who encountered Jesus was changed. There was never a neutral response - either acceptance of his offer of faith, or a move away from him.

When looking at these parables in the context of Jesus' call to discipleship, we can see that they are less about property, pearls, treasure or nets, than about the joy of discovery and being discovered. Ultimately the kingdom is about a relationship with Christ, and striving to live his values with patience and joy.