

Sermon 26/07/2020

Matthew 13 44-45

Two parables both about finding something worth selling everything to possess. In the first the man finds something unexpectedly and takes what is probably illegal action to keep it. In the second his finding is the product of long seeking – the pearl of great price – representing what is of ultimate value.

Both ask questions of us in the context of Lockdown: what have you discovered to be of ultimate value over the last few months – what would you give everything up for? What MATTERS? And what have been your unexpected discoveries? Are you perhaps clearer in your heart about what matters and what doesn't? Take a moment to think about that.....

The answers to those questions are about what makes us more human – what contributes to our flourishing as human beings. Jesus said "I have come that they may have life, and have it in abundance." That's what God desires and what the Church should be about – our human flourishing. So maybe your answers are to do with family and relationships – the beauty of arts and music - the wonderful abundance of the natural world – your deep life-long longing for meaning, for God: your prayer life. Perhaps too you've been surprised by what you've been able to let go of – what's proved not be of value, not important.

The Ministry team have been undertaking a "What is the Spirit saying to the Churches" exercise and asking you all some questions, and your answers will clearly be related to this discussion. Bishop David Jenkins in the wonderful way he had of expressing Truth concisely, said:

" God is not about Religion. God is about the fulfilment of being human and personal in the glory and celebration of the community of love."

We've had to give up a lot of religion and religious practice, but maybe in the process discovered more about what makes us human and personal. Newly consecrated Archbishop Stephen Cottrell talks about the need to become a simpler and humbler church. That means being more concerned with what is of ultimate value, the pearl of great price – our deepest humanity. Robert Warren in his book "Being human, being church" says that the agenda of the Church needs to become one of sustaining one another in the fulfilment of our humanity. He says that three tasks follow:

1. The pastoral work of helping each other to wholeness and holiness. It's because when we moved here 3 ½ years ago and were looking for a church to attend, that I could see this was a priority for Toby and his colleagues, that we started worshipping here, and are still here today!
2. The Church becoming a place where the gospel is lived that's about our values of mercy and kindness.
3. The Church has a role in the whole of society to help establish a civilisation of love and justice: its prophetic role.

What this challenging time is teaching us is about learning to trust and let go of all that is not central to that task of sustaining our humanity and the health of the natural environment of which we are part. Richard Rohr in his daily meditation of July 5 says that change is inevitable – it will often be finance driven – the old will fall apart. But amidst the apparent chaos and the pain of that, we are to listen at a deeper level to the treasure that is emerging and saying Yes to that. It's natural to want to hold on the old, the familiar, the habitual, but, Rohr says, spiritual transformation is always a process of letting go, of trusting and saying Yes to what is emerging, of prioritising the quality of our inner

life, because that is the soil in which the buried treasure is to be found. Pay attention to what you are discovering, to what is emerging. And we can trust and let go because we know the truth of St Paul's wonderful words in our first reading from Romans 8: There is nothing in heaven or earth that can separate us from God's love. Knowing that at a deep, heart level, enables us to say Yes.

So pay attention to what you have discovered about your humanity over these last few difficult months – including your apparent weaknesses and failures, because those can be the cracks which allow God's light to emerge and bring transformation. Listen to your heart. Prioritise your inner life – go deeper. Trust and learn to let go so that the pearl of great price, the buried treasure, can emerge.