

## Heart's Desire

So we have a worldwide pandemic, economic collapse here at home and race wars in the streets.

Meanwhile, a previously unheard of comet is brightening the night sky over much of the world.

Comets used to be seen as messengers of doom, and this one seems to have arrived right on time!

So maybe it's no surprise that this past week at the church, it seemed like just about everyone was on edge.

There was your rector, barking at folks who were asking to use the bathroom.

Then a houseless woman started throwing a literal temper tantrum, throwing picture frames and glass all over the joint.

Word has it that even the long suffering monks over at Wallyhouse gave in to some eyeball rolling, at least once last week.

Has your life felt something like that lately?

Upside down and befuddled?

Is the utter ineptitude of our government leaders, which is helping fuel a disease that most other countries have figured out, getting to you too?

Not to mention the many people feeling really scary financial pain as the crisis on the mainland becomes our crisis.

With tourism at a halt.

With jobs nowhere to be found.

With too many bank accounts drained.

Yes!

I know!

Depressing!!

So why dwell on it all?

Here's why.

Because if we hope that our faith can lance the boil of our current troubles, we need to name the boil.

Look closely at it!

And then, with a deep breath, take the needle of the gospel, and lance that boil!

Thankfully, that's exactly what today's gospel lesson helps us do.

It's a wake up call to people (like us!) who are in trouble, to take another look.

At themselves.

At their situation.

And at God.

One thing that these stories of the pearl and the hidden treasure insist upon is that the world that God loves is NOT the perfect world, where those in power are kind, where those who govern are wise and caring.

No, these parables insist that God loves this world **as it is**, and that God loves us, as we are.

We know that because the fellow who bought the farm that contained the pearl didn't just buy the few inches of farmland where the pearl was lying.

He bought the whole farm!

With its broken down barn and weeds and chickens.

With its worms and ants too. Capon, Parables, 117.

Meaning, in God's great scheme of things, everyone matters, everything counts.

Maybe that's why we pray every week in the Creed for the catholic church.

"Catholic" meaning universal.

Inclusive – of everything.

Yes, the good, but also the bad and the ugly.

Somehow, when we buy the farm, the whole farm, with its treasures and trash, that's where mercy and grace, and love reveal themselves.

How do we get to that place of "buying the farm?"

By doing what the merchant does.

By getting rid of everything he once thought as valuable.

In other words, by dying.

Dying to self.

Dying to my bigotries and resentments.

Isn't that what Jesus means when he says the merchant sells everything he has?

He sells his certainty, his preconceived notions.

In Jesus, it really is all about dying to all of that, so that in the dying, we might open our eyes to the new life that arises from his death.

Maybe that's why we have the expression: "he bought the farm."

Because the pearl of great price, the kingdom of heaven, isn't found in fame or fortune or even in good health.

It's here!

In the rough and tumble of our ordinary, everyday lives.

Even in the midst of pandemic.

And economic collapse.

And moronic leaders.

And in order to accept that insight, to come to terms with our true condition, we gotta die!

Jesus tells us that when he is lifted up, he will drag the whole world to himself.

Meaning:

Everything will be redeemed.

Everyone is on the road to holiness.

Everything matters on our road to the kingdom.

And there is this too.

Our parable asks each of us perhaps the most important question we can ever be faced with.

It's this:

What is your hearts desire?

And what are you willing to do — or let go of — or risk — to have it?

A seminary professor took a bunch of grad students studying theology to a maximum security prison, where students and prisoners together studied Matthew's gospel.

When they got to the parable of the pearl, one of the students spoke of her dream of earning a doctorate in theology.

Years earlier, she met her future husband in the seminary, but before fulfilling her dream, they got married, had children and she became the "pastor's wife." J. Levine, *Short Stories*, 148-9.

When the children were old enough for her to return to school her husband insisted that one doctor in the family was enough, thank you very much.

She applied to a graduate program anyway, and much to her delight, she was accepted.

“For various and good reasons, entering the program coincided with the ending of her marriage.

As she explained to her fellow students and the prisoners one night:

‘I never expected to find myself here; but when I got accepted, I did what I needed to do to be here.

I gave up my home and my status as a minister’s wife.

I took out loans.

I took back my original name.

I don’t know where this is all leading, but it doesn’t matter.

This is my pearl.’ Id., paraphrased

Then one of the prisoners spoke up.

‘My pearl is freedom.

And I can only get that by owning up to who I am and to what I've done; admitting my crimes, not excusing them.

And so I'm taking the anger management classes and getting the therapy I need to really change who I've been.

In order to be a free man, I've got to become a new man.' Id.

When the professor remarked that the Greek word for "pearl" is "margarita," another prisoner, a recovering alcoholic, chuckled as she recalled that the margarita was her pearl of great price, back in her drinking days.

'I gave up everything for it: job, family, self-respect; now I'm putting the same energy into my sobriety.' Id.

What is your heart's desire?

And when's the last time you asked yourself that question?

Maybe that's why, in some strange way, we are actually lucky to be living in these days of pandemic, economic collapse and terrible government.

When all is humming along smoothly, we easily forget that:

"the Father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth..." Gospel of Thomas, 113.

Or as Jesus says in another part of the Gospel of Thomas,



“split a piece of wood, and I am there, lift a stone, you will find me there.”

Or as Meister Eckhart says:

“Each person has within herself a vintage wine cellar, but they seldom drink from it.”

Chaos and calamity have a way of helping us refocus on that which really matters in the one, short life we each of us have.

Such things allow us to remember that no matter what, the one thing that makes all humans the same is that one day, we will all “buy the farm.”

To put a finer point on it, we will all die.

But for the grace of God, we are all of us little more than walking piles of future dirt.

And realizing that simple fact, perhaps we can learn to trust the grace of this gentle God which saves us from such an end.

And in the trusting, perhaps we can begin, here and now, to let go.

Of our need for security.

Of our need to be liked.

Of our need for control.

Every letting go is a small death.

And every death, no matter how small, is a step toward God.

And every step toward God — is a step toward embracing our heart's desire.

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