

Sunday 16th August – Matthew 13:44-46: Hidden treasure

Those of you who know the Trendalls well will know that Alise and I love shopping in charity shops. We love a good bargain, and for us charity shops are a treasure trove of unexpected delights. The joy of charity shopping is that you go looking for treasure, and you never know what you'll find.

Most of the time, what we're looking for is the everyday stuff – but occasionally we find something worth a bit more money. I have a painting on my wall which cost me £6 in a charity shop but is worth a couple of hundred. I often find branded shirts for a few pounds which would cost £50-£100 new. My record is a £5 shirt in the HULA shops in Woburn Sands that retails for £145. My all-time bargain record, though, goes to a Paul Smith coat which would have cost me £240 on their website but I got for £12. **Treasure is there for those who go looking for it.**

The excitement of the idea of hidden treasure runs deep in our culture. Pirates have fascinated us for centuries. Antiques Roadshow has been running for decades at 8pm on Sunday nights and millions of us tune in to watch ordinary people find out if they've got real treasure hidden in their loft. My favourite comedy programme of the last few years – Detectorists – is all about two blokes who spend all their spare time walking up and down fields with metal detectors.

And the kingdom of God, says Jesus, is just like that: hidden treasure. But this short and simple parable is a surprisingly challenging one, because it tells us two somewhat uncomfortable things about what it means to follow Jesus. Firstly, Jesus says that **his kingdom is hidden** – in other words, it can be difficult to find. Why is that? Surely God would want to make Himself more obvious? That is a question that most people ask at some point, and it's often been posed to me over the years. It's a question many are asking now: where is God in the pandemic? [Our young people sang that to us beautifully just now: 'Wondering what is left for me, I stare into the unforeseen.'](#)

Jesus himself embodies this dilemma. Yes, he performs dozens of miracles, but he refuses to make himself a travelling circus, he shuns publicity and power, and although we love these parables the uncomfortable truth is that he deliberately makes them not totally straightforward. In a portion of chapter 13 we haven't read this month he says that the point of parables is that their meaning remains hidden to people, only those who really take time to reflect on them will receive what he calls 'the secrets of the kingdom'....

The second uncomfortable thing we learn is that **following Jesus is costly**. Costly in both senses of the word – yes, it's costly as in precious, it is great treasure after all. But it's also costly in what it requires of us. In both of these short stories, notice that when the treasure is found, the finder doesn't just run off with it. They sell *all they have* to acquire the treasure.

What we believe is good news. And after all these years I still believe it's the best news I ever heard. God's grace is wonderful. It offers forgiveness, peace, hope, purpose. But it's not cheap. It costs nothing but demands everything. It's easy to pray a prayer asking Jesus into our lives, but hard to then choose to live out that prayer day by day. It's easy to speak about love but hard to actually love day by day: for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.

And again, many find themselves asking: why is it hard? If it's the right, the best, the only true way to live, why isn't it easier? But nothing of real value is ever easy, is it?

And there is where we start to find an answer to this dilemma. Built into this world is the great paradox that that the things most worth having are those which cost us something of ourselves. The hard graft of building on rock is what holds us fast in the storm.

I've deliberately wanted to unsettle you a bit today, but let me finish with the reason why I still want to sell everything I have for the hidden treasure of the kingdom. When bad things happen – whether that's a global pandemic or a personal tragedy – I want to take my pain to a God who understands. The heart of our good news, the heart of what it means to follow Jesus is precisely that we follow someone who went there before us. [As Joseph sang for us just now, echoing the prayer of many human hearts: 'Come down into our world – God, is this your time?'](#)

In the Christian faith, God enters into the mess of our world. It costs him everything, even His own Son. As I often to say to families at a funeral, God knows what it is like to grieve. Other worldviews will explain death and evil and mess in terms of the balancing forces of karma. Or ask us to put our faith in a God who is too pure to touch the mess of this world. But these are impersonal solutions. I want a God who gets His hands dirty, who sits with us in the mess. And in Jesus, we find this God. **Jesus is the hidden treasure in the mud and soil of a normal earthly field.**

That's why it's precious. That's what gives me hope in this season of tragedy and pain. And that is why we can take the risk, and give everything we have to own this treasure. Amen.

As we respond today, I'm going to play something unexpected, which is the theme tune from [Detectorists](#). It wasn't written as a Christian song, but I want you to imagine this is God singing the words, and it fits the theme perfectly. He'll be our treasure – and He's waiting for us...