



First United Church of Oak Park

Questions to Sustain Us

Matthew 13: 40-46

The Rev. John Edgerton

October 4, 2020

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable, he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet. I will open my mouth to speak in parables, I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.

Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, the realm of God. The Realm of God is that place which is not any one place, but anywhere. That time of great blessing that is yet to come, and which is nonetheless already here. The world as it should be, life as it should be. It's not easy to describe; it is hidden from the foundation of the world.

Parables are so wonderful because what they give are questions. Answers may satisfy human hunger for understanding but for a day; the right question can sustain our whole lives. This is why Jesus will not teach except in parables. Parables like this:

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.

Hidden. Why hidden?

Once upon a time, there was a woman who was out at an open house. It was not a grand house, just very ordinary and fine. She had gone to a lot of open houses. Enough so that she always brought a pair of slippers to change into to avoid those weird blue footies. Enough so that she knew where to look in an attic to find evidence of old knob and tube wiring that hadn't been completely removed and which would portend problems in the closing.

So there she was in her slippers, poking around in the attic of a stranger's house. Under her foot, she felt a floorboard was loose. Curiosity getting the better of her, she pulled it up to see what was underneath the floorboard. What she saw hidden there, underneath the floorboard — it was so wonderful. In it she could

see what life could be like, in it she could see what she could be like. Just looking at treasure hidden under the floorboard filled her with joy. She had to have it.

She rushed out of the attic, out of the house, forgetting the outdoor shoes sitting on the welcome mat, and rushing to her car still wearing her slippers. She emptied her 401k, she went to her bank, got a cashier's check so big it emptied her account — they made her show two IDs and the manager tried to talk her out of it. "We have new account products with rewards points" — they didn't understand, and she couldn't explain. She took the check that represented everything she had and rushed back to the open house. By this time it was dark, the open house was over, and she knocked on the door.

The owner of the house opened the door, but he did not look surprised. "These must be your shoes." The woman said, "I want to buy this house." Handing over the check that totaled far more than the asking price, she said again, "I want to buy this house. But it has to be today. It has to be now." The owner of the house took the check and said only, "I knew it," before handing over the keys and walking away into the night.

This would certainly make for an awkward closing. Her lawyer was going to pitch a fit, but she didn't care. She rushed up to the attic, heart in her throat, rushed to the eaves, pried up the floorboard, there it was — wonderful — a treasure just as she remembered; in it she saw what life could be like, what she could be like. It was even more wonderful somehow now that it was hers, even more wonderful somehow now that it had cost her so much. She put the treasure back under the floorboard, nailed it flush, and lived her life.

The years passed. Generations waxed and waned. And she lived in that house where joy was close and all the good and bad and great fullness and the so much-ness of life went on. But the great treasure was still there, hidden under the floorboards. It was still hers.

Eventually, the stairs got to be too much, and the cleaning got to be too much, and it all got to be too much, and it came time to make of life something a bit more tidy. It was not a grand house, just very ordinary and fine. The agent took one look and told her to repaint everything and put almost every single piece of furniture in storage so that it no longer looked like her house. But the great treasure was still there, hidden under the floorboards. It was still hers.

On the day of the open house she could see that it was filled with people coming and going. They looked over every bit of the house, ran the faucets, opened the

windows, sniffed the air in the basement judiciously, went poking through the attic looking for evidence of knob and tube wiring. People signed in the book and agents left their cards. And one person forgot their shoes — makes you wonder how they got back to their car. But the great treasure was still there, hidden under the floorboards. It was still hers.

Then that night, far after the open house was finished, there was a knock at the door. It was a young man, young enough to be her son. He was wearing slippers and holding a check in his hands. “These must be your shoes,” she said. The young man said, “I want to buy this house.” He handed over a check that totaled far more than the asking price. “I want to buy this house. But it has to be today. It has to be now.”

The woman who owned the house knew full well what this buyer was after. She knew why he was there. She knew the value of what it was that he sought to own for himself. She took the check and said, “I knew it.” And the great treasure was still there, hidden under the floorboards. But it was no longer hers. It belonged now to the one who gave everything for it, out of joy. And she handed over the keys, and walked away into the night.

This is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. 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.

Buys? Buys from whom? Where did the person he bought it from get the treasure? Why are those most precious things hidden, kept in the most secret, silent places of the heart?

Parables are so wonderful because what they give are questions. Answers may satisfy human hunger for understanding but for a day, but questions can sustain our whole lives.

What might be so wondrous, so joyful, that you might give your everything to have it? What might be so wondrous, that it simply must be hidden away?

The wondrous, deep and hidden things of your life — who did you receive them from? And what did it cost you to receive?

When it is time, who will you give those most wondrous things to? And what will it cost them?

May these questions sustain you in the week to come.