

W Thomas – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost Christ Episcopal Church, Elizabeth City NC – 09-07-25

The end of the Gospel passage says these words, *So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.* That is one of the hard sayings that fits into a number of places that find its way in and through scripture. If you take a look in the Acts of the Apostles, the early parts of the Acts, *they sold all that they have and gave it to the community.*

And then, of course, there are the number of passages in the various synoptic accounts of a person called the rich young ruler. And so you have those particular people dealing with the thought of selling all your possessions. So having said all of that, let me tell you what this sermon is going to be about, because I'm going to tell a story.

This sermon finds a pathway to understanding in the story of the Pearl of Great Price to the assertion of Jesus that none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. So Matthew 13:45 to 46 is where I jump off from. And that is Jesus saying, *The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant upon finding a pearl of great value in a field, goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.* Now, I first learned this story over half a lifetime ago from Bishop Bill Stough. It's a foundational story that helps us understand relationship.

Relationship to money, relationship to God. And as all storytellers want, I have built upon that which I heard from him. And now I bring it to you as perhaps my own story.

So again, finding the pearl, the pearl of great price and selling all that you have. There are a couple of characters in this particular story. There is a seller and there is a buyer.

Now you have to get your head wrapped around the Trinity a little bit enough that the seller is God. And Jesus shows up here somewhere. Well, let the seller be God.

And you come along and you find the pearl of great price in that field. And the pearl of great price is, this is where the story gets complicated, but don't get worried, is Jesus. And you decide you want Jesus.

You want Jesus. And I'm going to say the worst way because that's an expression, but hopefully it's the best way. And you will do anything you can to get Jesus.

And you discover that there is someone who will help you get Jesus by the pearl, if you will. And you go up and you find the seller of the field who has the pearl, which is Jesus. And you say, what will it take for me to have this? And the seller says, very simply, sell all that you have.

Give me all that you have. And you go, okay. Like any good human being.

All that I have. All that I have on me. Here, take my wallet.

And the seller says, well, that's very nice. Thank you very much, but I think you need some help. I'm going to help you do an inventory.

I'm going to give you a chance to work your way through this so you really understand what all that you have means. And so you put, remember, you really want the pearl. And the pearl is? Work with me, people. Jesus. You really want that.

And so as the seller starts to take you through it, it says, say, do you have a house? And you go, well, yes, I do have a house.

Lovely. In that house, are there rooms? Yes, there are rooms. Is there a kitchen? Yes.

In the kitchen, is there food? You go, well, that's lovely. Yes, there's a kitchen with food. Are there bedrooms? Yes.

Do you have clothes in the closet? Yes. Do you have cars in a garage? Yes. I want all of those.

And you go, okay. Because you really want the pearl, which is Jesus. You're in that spot where it's just exactly what you want.

And you think you're done. He goes, no, no, no. A few more questions for you.

Do you have a house in the mountains? Yeah. I want that. Do you have any stocks and bonds and bank accounts and all of that? Yes.

And you're beginning to see that this is everything. He says, "Oh, by the way, do you have a spouse, a wife, a husband?" You go, yes. And you're sort of smiling at that point.

Maybe. I don't know. Depends upon your relationship there.

But when he gets to the point about do you have any kids and they're teenagers, you say, yes, please. At least for three years. Take them.

Okay. And then, well, the thing is, by the time you're done, you have given everything you have. And you are the happiest person, the most contented person you have ever been in your entire life.

And you start to walk away, contented and happy. You have Jesus. You get two steps away and you hear, (loud throat clearing noise) you know that expression, you're waiting for the other shoe to drop.

You're always on this one, right? You turn and you go, okay. I've given the relational thing here. It's the seller, right? Okay.

What is it you want? He says, well, you know, all of this stuff, the house with the kitchen and the food and the bedrooms and the garage with the cars and house in the mountains, the banks, the bonds, the wife, the kids, all that. Tell you what, a little bit more, frankly, I can handle right now. So hang on to it.

You go, all right. I get Jesus. And all I had to do was to give up everything.

And I got it back. Oh, my goodness gracious. Could there be a better deal ever? Nothing changed.

Walk away. You start to walk a little bit farther. And then did you hear that? (another loud throat clearing noise) Did you hear that? Did you hear it? And you go, ah, go.

Seller says to you, remember God, I just want you to know one thing. All that stuff, all those monies, banks, bonds, that's mine. You're my steward.

You're my manager. You are to take care of it for me. And on occasion, I may whisper in your ear that I need some of the food from my kitchen to go feed somebody.

I need you to maybe give somebody a bed one night in my bedrooms. I need you to drive somebody to visit somebody maybe in prison or something like that. I understand.

Now, I don't ever want to hear about any of my kids not having enough food to eat or anybody being abused that's in a relationship with. You are my steward and my manager. And that's the story I learned half a lifetime ago.

But like any good biblical story, it starts to build a period of reflection. And so within me, I have found my own touchstone with that story. And maybe for you, you might find your own touchstone building out of that story and a passage of scripture that touches you deeply as well.

And if you remember, we started this with the sell all your possessions passage that came from the gospel today. And I mentioned that which was they sold all that they had in the Acts of the Apostles. And then I foreshadowed, here's a good word, I foreshadowed for you the rich young ruler.

Now, when you take a look at the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10, this is the young man who comes up to Jesus and says, *I want to follow you. You've got everything, you've got it. I want to be your follower.*

Jesus says, well, tell me about yourself. And he tells him a lot about himself because he's really smart. Tell me, do you know the law and the prophet? Yes.

Do you know the Shema? He knows all of that. He's got so much good head knowledge. And then Jesus says to him, well, that's lovely.

Where is this going? Go sell all that you have and then you can become my disciple. And you can follow me. But he was a man, as it says in Scripture, in all the accounts, of many possessions.

And we see him walking off the pages of the Bible with his story unresolved. However, in the gospel, according to Mark, we are given one more insight. The possibility of the deep relationship that we all crave.

Because in the gospel of Mark, it is said this way. Jesus looked on him and loved him. He's loved in any of the passages, but it says specifically there.

He looked on him and loved him. Could he ever possibly not be in relationship with that which we claim in the story before as the pearl? Could this love not have drawn him back? And I stand before you. That's my story.

I got lots of head knowledge. I'm real good at remembering most things. You used to remember more things when I was younger.

And I'll say to you this. As I reflect on this particular story and I discovered that indeed, when I did sell or give up all that I had. And I received it back.

And I understood my relationship to it. Then all of a sudden, the fullness and richness of all the immeasurable aspects of his power became known to me as all of right. And it could bring me to the moment where in a few weeks ago, when I discovered these words in Psalm 71, verse 18.

That's my gift I have received from you. As I stand here before you sharing these thoughts.

*And now that I am old and gray headed and, oh God, do not forsake me.
Till I make known your strength to this generation. And your power to all who
are to come.*

I think that's what the rich young ruler was called to do.

When he stepped back into the pages of life. With the full love of Jesus Christ. I invite you to find that same moment.

And revel in it. Because you are so loved.

All these words I offer in the name of God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.