

## 17<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

You probably remember the show, "Let's Make a Deal." In that game show, contestants are often given a chance to take some cash or trade it for what is behind door number one. Maybe the cash is \$100. What is behind the curtain could be cans of Dinty Moore Stew or it could be a boat or a trip, worth many times more than the \$100. People in the audience are screaming, "Take the cash," while others are saying, "go for what's behind the door." Sometimes the guests take a risk and win big. Other times they go for what is safe, the cash in the hand.

Everyone has different levels of tolerance for risk. Some people are up for an adventure. They can gamble money freely. They invest in speculative land deals. They tell stories of things they have done, people they have met, and the money they have made. However seldom will you hear of the things that went wrong. Most other people don't have that level of risk and would rather have things safe and secure. Being safe is not a bad thing. It pays the bills, saves money for college, and means fewer trips to the emergency room. But it might mean a life that doesn't have much meaning or purpose.

Jesus is challenging His followers today to take a risk. In fact, take the biggest risk of your lives. By using the parable of the buried treasure and the pearl of great price he is saying that this life has choices. A hired hand making basic wages is working the land and happens upon a buried treasure. He isn't allowed to claim it himself because it is not his property. So, he takes a risk and sells everything he has to buy the land with the treasure on it. He is taking a chance that the treasure is worth much more than what he currently owns. The Kingdom of Heaven is about taking a risk that doing God's will is worth more than living day to day for one's own interests. It's about letting go of what you currently think is valuable: power, pleasure, and possessions to acquire that which is really valuable: Life eternal with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In another parable Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a merchant who knows the value of pearls. He knows that most of them he can buy and sell easily. He makes money by marking up the price of the pearls and reselling them. But when he finds a really valuable pearl he sells all his possessions to purchase this one. You are probably asking yourself the same question I ask, "Then what?" Once you own the pearl you can only enjoy its value when you sell it! Hmm. Maybe that is the point. The Kingdom of Heaven is not about acquiring earthly possessions. It is about doing the will of the Father. What is the will of the Father? It is to be in loving service of God and neighbor. It is about taking up your cross and following Jesus. It is about selling your possessions and giving to the poor. It's about forgiving seventy-seven times.

The third parable about the Kingdom reminds us that when we love freely or forgive often or give away our possessions to the poor there will be some people who will use you and others who will be changed drastically by your kindness. You will find that in your dragnet there will be wonderful experiences and times of great pain. The Kingdom is about the wisdom of seeing and doing God's will even knowing all that. It is about letting God sort out the good and evil without worrying about it now. Our job now is to do God's will.

I suspect that many people rejected Jesus because He was telling them to take such risks. He was saying, "Playing it safe won't get you into the Kingdom." Moses didn't play it safe when God told Him to go back to Egypt to free His people. The prophets didn't play it safe when God told them to go to the king and tell him that he needs to reform his ways. Jesus tells His followers that if you want the greatest adventure of your life you have to be willing to let go of what you know for that which is yet unseen. You need to seek the Kingdom in your own life and then give away that life in loving service. In addition, seeking the Kingdom and living Kingdom values won't be universally popular. You will still face trials and difficulties. But do it anyway. God will take care of the rest. Don't play it safe, take a risk. It's worth it.