

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“What Are You After?”

March 27, 2022

Matthew 13:44-46.

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Sometimes You Win, Sometimes you Learn: Sermon Series- Pt. 2 Pearl of great price

Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night hungry? After going downstairs and opening the fridge, have you found yourself standing there wondering what you wanted? So you pick a bit here, and a bit there, you had a bit of this and a bit of that, until you were filled but not satisfied and so you just went to bed.

People find this to be true not only with food, but also in other areas of their lives as well. Many people have found themselves filling their lives with various things, yet still finding their lives unfulfilled. Saturated, but not satisfied.

Mother Teresa observed during one of her early visits to America after a commercial was shown about weight loss products— “In India people are dying of physical starvation. But in America, people are dying of emotional and spiritual starvation.”

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

The merchant in this parable seems to be doing fairly well. He’s successful enough, and lives a comfortable life...but one day he discovers a priceless pearl that expands his mind. He sees something so valuable that everything he owns seems to pale in comparison. Everything he possessed that seemed so valuable now appears dull and lackluster...so he liquidates his assets in order to obtain this priceless object.

The biblical times in which this parable was told was marked by political and economic instability – sound familiar. Yet we had banks, in biblical times there were no banks or safe-deposit boxes, so people often buried their valuables, and sometimes they remained buried, abandoned. Finding such a treasure was a once-in-a-lifetime discovery. Just taking it would be theft, but buying the land and paying a price changed all that.

The merchant in the story didn’t need to be persuaded of the pearl’s worth; it was obvious. The pearl put all he deemed important into a different perspective, because in it, he discovered something of utmost worth. It was something he had been searching for all his life.

We’re all seeking a life that matters--not mere existence. We all need a reason to get up in the morning; otherwise, why live another day? Like it or not, we have to face some ultimate questions: “What’s the point of life?” “Who am I, and why am I here?” “What am I searching for?” “What am I after?”

That's why people still pan for gold today in the rivers of California. And in Ontario I think that's why so many people go to garage sales. We've all heard the true story of the man in Pennsylvania who paid \$4 for an old painting, only to discover inside the frame was the 25th copy of the original Declaration of Independence. It later sold for \$8.1 million.

I read a definition of a garage sale the other day: "A garage sale is when people spend \$20 on gas to drive their air conditioned cars around town for the privilege of standing in the hot sun and trying to get a \$4 lamp for \$3.25." Now we have cyber-garage sales -kijiji. You've heard it said, "One man's junk is another man's treasure." Today, "one man's junk is another man's eBay or Kijiji sale!"

Why are so many of us constantly restless in a pursuit of something more? What is it that we are hungry for? And what is it, that will satisfy us? Where does genuine satisfaction come from? To answer these questions, we must look at the things we use to try to fill that emptiness.

I

The first way people have tried to satisfy the hunger within them has been through trying to fill their **pockets with pennies and lives with possessions**. Money and material possessions have largely been, over the years, a measurement of achievement, happiness and satisfaction.

A billboard advertisement for a savings and loans in Dallas Texas read, "We lend happiness at eighteen locations."

Do they? Do they, really? Society generally believes that if we have enough pennies in our pockets and possessions in our homes that we would feel fulfilled. Ads in our new papers, on our televisions, YouTube, twitter, etc.; all shout to us that our ultimate fulfillment will be found in their products. And so we fill our homes with these products.

I remember how, after a good friend of ours died, we set about to help the only relative sort out the things she wanted to keep and sell the rest at a few yard sales. It seems strange that after a lifetime of working to earn the money to acquire all of these things, they were sold for pennies on the dollar.

I read of a man who stood to speak at a funeral of his friend.
He read the dates on his tombstone from the beginning to the end
First came the date of his birth. And he read the following date with tears.
But what mattered most was the dash between those two years
For that dash represents all the time he spent upon this earth.
And now only those that knew him and loved him know what the little line is worth
For it matters not how much we own,
The car, the house, the cash
What matters most of all in life is how we lived, and how we loved
And how we spent that dash.

It is very true. It is about what how we have spent our live that matters most, not the money we have spent.

II

The first way people have tried to satisfy the hunger within them has been through trying to fill their pockets with pennies and homes with possessions and secondly their **senses with pleasure.**

Most, if not all of us, don't plan to be multimillionaires, but what we would like is that we should have a good time while we are here. The purpose of life, for those who live according to the pleasure of their senses, is to enjoy oneself as one moves across the years. So as much as possible, they say we should avoid pain and stress; pursue those activities that give pleasure.

Now, of course there is nothing wrong with wanting to feel good. It is right and natural that we should want to live in comfortable homes, surrounded by our loved one. There is nothing wrong with ease and comfort, the trouble comes only when we begin to measure life in such terms; when we make our pleasure the final criterion in how we live.

A husband and wife visited an orphanage where they hoped to adopt a child. In an interview with the boy they so very much wanted to adopt; they told him in glowing terms about the many things they could give him. To their amazement, the little fellow said, "If you can only give me a good home, clothes, toys then I might as well stay where I am. I get those things here." "What then do you want?" asked the prospective mother. "I just want someone to love me." Replied the little boy.

Money, material possessions, and pleasure can go only so far; but not far enough.

III

People have tried to satisfy the hunger within them through trying to fill their pockets with pennies and homes with possessions, and the pleasures of the senses **and also the pursuit of power.**

We see that terrible reality being played out by Putin's invasion of Ukraine in a large scale. That indiscriminate pursuit of power at all costs. We see the ultimate madness of it and empty destruction as a result of it. It is clear how futile and wasteful it is, because of the stark reality of it is vomited at us on every news cast.

However, the pursuit of power happens on all levels of life. People have tried to fill the emptiness by building their little empires.

In Weekend Magazine there was an article on the world's most successful men, and it said, "that each one are not particularly happy individuals, and that many have noted that each has this in common—a sad face." A famous reported once said, "What does it take to make people happy? Money? Fame? Success? Good health? Children? Youth?"

I came across a picture in a book about the Kennedy family. It had the young David Kennedy sitting outside the White House. The picture had been taken several years before by his Aunt Jacqueline and was inscribed by his Uncle John and the words— "A future President inspects his property." Though he had name, status, wealth, and all that money could buy, and yet, his unhappiness and despair of life resulted in his taking his own.

IV

People have tried to satisfy the hunger within them through trying to fill their pockets with pennies and homes with possessions, and the pleasures of the senses, and also the pursuit of power; yet, this simple parable points us to the One who represents the pearl of great price.

A pearl is the only precious gem people don't create. Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds are rough crystals and a craftsman must cut and polish them. But a pearl can't be cut. A pearl comes as a result of suffering. A little piece of sand or other irritant gets into an oyster or clam and as the oyster coats that irritant with a substance called nacre (nay-ker). As the oyster continually covers the source of pain with nacre, the result is a beautiful pearl. The pearl is the only gem that comes from a living creature.

As believers, the parable of pearl points us to Jesus; Who through His suffering created value that was priceless when added to our life – and puts everything else into perspective.

Chuck Colson understood this. He had had it all as he worked with President Nixon; until he was sent to prison. It was there, after everything—the money, power, position, prestige—were taken away that he came face to face with the one person who could bring the satisfaction that he was searching for through so many other things. It was there that he turned his life over to Christ.

The whole purpose of his life changed after that and he began a ministry to prisoners. His whole purpose and satisfaction changed.

Astronaut Charles Duke is one of only twelve men who have left footprints on the moon. He was the lunar module pilot for the Apollo 16 Mission. He now lives in New Braunfels, Texas.

He wasn't a Christian when he walked on the moon. Here's his story: "After walking on the moon, I was bored. Fame, fortune, a spot in the history books: I had it all. But if you had been a fly on the wall in my home, you would have seen that I wasn't so hot. I was failing miserably as a husband and father. Though I had gone to church all my life, I had all of God I needed in that one hour every Sunday morning. Even the moon had not been a spiritual experience. I wasn't looking for God. I only knew Jesus the way you know the U.S. Presidents—in name only. My business succeeded, and the money rolled in, but I was bored again. But Dottie wasn't. She had changed. Her depression had lifted, and she demonstrated a new, believing faith. She turned to God—not me—for answers to her problems.

One night I attended a Bible Study with her that focused on one penetrating question, 'Who was Jesus?' All my life I had said the words, 'Son of God,' but had never trusted Him. That night I came face-to-face with the opportunity to follow Him. I prayed with Dottie in the front seat of our car and gave my life over to Christ. I didn't see angels. I didn't hear music. No blinding lights. But I knew what I knew. It was real. The next day I awoke with an insatiable desire to read the Bible. It cost the government \$400 million for me to walk three days on the moon—and it's over. But to walk with Jesus is free and it lasts forever!"

Now that's priceless! You think about that. Amen.

