Book 13

SUNDAY, AUGUST 19, 1984

"HIDDEN TREASURE"

MATTHEW 13:44-46

SOME PEOPLE SEARCH AND SEARCH ALL OF THEIR LIVES AND NEVER SEEM TO BE ABLE TO FIND WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR IN LIFE. IN FACT, SOME SEARCH AND SEARCH AND DO NOT KNOW FOR SURE WHAT THEY ARE SEARCHING FOR.

OTHERS AMONG US DON'T SEEM TO BE LOOKING FOR ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR, BUT GO ABOUT OUR JOBS WITH FAITHFULNESS AND ONE DAY STUMBLE UPON HIDDEN TREASURE. STILL OTHERS AMONG US SEARCH DILIGENTLY FOR AN ULTIMATE MEANING IN LIFE, AND, WHEN THEY FIND IT, THEY KNOW IT, AND THEY GIVE THEMSELVES TO IT. THEY KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT IS OF ULTIMATE VALUE IN LIFE AND WHAT IS NOT OF ULTIMATE VALUE.

IN THE GOSPEL LESSON JUST READ, JESUS TOLD TWO PARABLES ABOUT FINDING THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE: WHAT HE CALLED THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, OR, IN OTHER PLACES, THE KINGDOM OF GOD. IN THE FIRST BRIEF PARABLE, JESUS SAID, "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD." AND IN THE SECOND PARABLE, HE SAID, "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A MERCHANT IN SEARCH OF FINE PEARLS, WHO, ON FINDING ONE PEARL OF GREAT VALUE, WENT AND SOLD ALL AND BOUGHT IT."

1. First, what is meant here by the phrase, "kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God"? When you hear those terms, what do you think of? Jesus meant more than simply life after death. When Jesus used this phrase, he was speaking of God's activity which is always present and creating throughout the cosmos. It is the energy of God which holds all creation together. It is the love of God which is everywhere present. It is the love of God which became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. It is the love of God which is active and working today in and among human beings. It is the harmony and inter-connectedness of all creation. It is the presence of God everywhere.

Thus, to be aware of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is to be aware of a cosmic spirituality which pervades the creation and which is alive and vibrant. To be aware of the kingdom of God is to be aware of the fact that all things are connected and interrelated and meant to be in harmony. To be aware of the kingdom of God is to be aware of the fact that God desires love and justice to prevail throughout the creation. To be aware of the kingdom of God is to know that God loves you and me and desires good for us.

2. But note secondly that in these two brief parables Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God as being hidden. It is not always readily

APPARENT. WE ARE NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATELY AWARE OF IT. THE HARMONY, THE INTER-CONNECTEDNESS OF CREATION, IS NOT ALWAYS VISIBLE. GOD'S LOVE, GOD'S JUSTICE, GOD'S PRESENCE, GOD'S ACTIVITY IS NOT ALWAYS CONSPICUOUS.

THE BIRTH, LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS. WHEN JESUS ENTERED THIS WORLD, EVERYONE DID NOT IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZE HIM AS GOD'S LOVE IN A HUMAN BEING. MANY PEOPLE, EVEN VERY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, SAW HIM AS THE ENEMY OF GOD. HE WAS BORN IN AN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACE AND IN A HUMBLE FAMILY. AS AN ADULT HE DID NOT GO STRIDING THROUGH THE WORLD AS A MESSIANIC KING WITH 12 LEGIONS OF ANGELS. HE DID NOT DIE AS A FAMOUS PERSON THAT EVERYONE KNEW AND RECOGNIZED -- BUT AS A COMMON CRIMINAL.

SO IT IS THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, GOD'S ACTIVITY, GOD'S POWER, GOD'S LOVE IS LIKE A TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD. IT IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN THE POMP AND GLORY OF THE WORLD, BUT IN HUMBLE, QUIET PLACES AND WHEREVER JUSTICE IS BEING DONE -- WHERE THE HUNGRY ARE FED, WHERE THE NAKED ARE CLOTHED, WHERE THE HOMELESS ARE WELCOMED, WHERE THE SICK ARE HEALED, WHERE SLAVES ARE LIBERATED, WHERE BREAD IS BROKEN AND A CUP IS SHARED.

AND SAID JESUS, THIS ACTIVITY OF GOD IS THE MOST VALUABLE, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN

THE WORLD, AND IT IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE, EVEN THOUGH IT IS OFTEN HIDDEN.

TO MAKE IT MORE PERSONAL, THINK FOR A MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE AS THE FIELD IN WHICH THE TREASURE, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, IS HIDDEN. AND SOMETIMES WE STUMBLE ONTO IT LIKE THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE PARABLE STUMBLED ONTO THE TREASURE BURIED IN THE FIELD. AND AT OTHER TIMES WE HAVE TO GO SEARCHING FOR IT LIKE THE MERCHANT IN SEARCH OF FINE PEARLS.

3. NOTE THIRDLY, THAT ONCE WE FIND THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND EXPERIENCE IT, THEN EVERYTHING IS CHANGED FOR US. WE BEGIN TO SEE THE WORLD AND ALL OF CREATION WITH COMPLETELY NEW AND DIFFERENT EYES.

LIKE THE MAN IN THE PARABLE WHEN HE FOUND THE TREASURE HIDDEN IN THE FIELD, THEN HE SAW THE FIELD IN A TOTALLY NEW WAY. IT TOOK ON AN ADDED VALUE.

THAT'S THE WAY IT ALWAYS IS -- WHEN WE HAVE FOUND SOMETHING ALTOGETHER PRECIOUS, A LIFE PARTNER, A FRIEND, OR A FULFILLMENT IN OUR LIFE'S WORK, THEN EVERYTHING ELSE GETS MEASURED BY IT.

THUS WHEN ONE EXPERIENCES THE KINGDOM OF GOD; WHEN ONE HAS EXPERIENCED THE HARMONY, THE CONNECTEDNESS OF ALL CREATION; WHEN ONE HAS

BEEN GIVEN EVEN A GLIMPSE OF THE LOVE OF GOD PRESENT IN ALL THINGS; THEN A NEW VISION TAKES OVER. EVERYTHING CHANGES! THIS TREASURE, THIS PEARL, OUTWEIGHS EVERYTHING. THAT'S WHY THE INDIVIDUAL IN EACH PARABLE WAS WILLING TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE TREASURE. NOT EVEN DEATH CAN TAKE AWAY THE TREASURE OR THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS FOREVER!

THIS MORNING, AS WE CELEBRATE HOLY COMMUNION TOGETHER -- REMEMBER THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRESENT AMONG US. GOD'S LOVE IS HERE! WE EXPERIENCE GOD IN SOME OF THE SIMPLEST THINGS IN LIFE. REMEMBER, TOO, THAT WE ARE ALL PART OF GOD'S CREATION AND ARE ALL CONNECTED WITH EVERYONE ELSE IN CREATION. THAT MEANS THAT ALL CREATION IS HOLY, INCLUDING YOU AND ME. AMEN.