

"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." Matthew 13:44-46

The discovery of hidden treasure tends to get people excited. At the retirement village where I was Chaplain in my second parish in Queensland a man who had been in trouble with the law was doing community service. As he was digging in one of the village's garden beds outside a resident's room he came across a glass jar containing several thousand dollars in cash. He couldn't believe his turn of luck! He was so happy he went out and bought a new set of clothes at the menswear shop and then went over the road to the hotel and shouted free drinks at the front bar. While he was drunk he also shouted to everyone how and where he had found the money. The local Police Sergeant soon shared his excitement. Word spread around town and residents of the retirement home with poor memories suddenly remembered they might have buried the loot. Others who normally complained about bad backs and arthritic knees were suddenly asking to be issued with shovels and forks to dig in the garden outside their own units. And relatives of deceased residents showed up claiming their mum or dad might have left the treasure there!

Australia's history is full of discoveries of hidden treasure. 150 years ago last month in Victoria 22 Cornish miners found the largest gold nugget the world had ever seen. It weighed 62kg. They named it "The Welcome Nugget". What a welcome surprise and windfall! 10 years later another man found one weighing 64 kg and they called it "The Welcome Stranger". Over in Western Australia three Irish gold diggers were riding horses when one horse lost a shoe so they set up camp. One man noticed a glint of reflected sunlight on the ground. It started the richest gold rush in Australia's history and the place became known by its Aboriginal name – Kalgoorlie.

It's exciting to hear treasure stories, discovery stories, good luck stories, but we also secretly wish we could be part of the action too. Jesus told some treasure stories in today's Gospel. And you and I can be part of that action.

"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."

Jesus was talking about the kingdom of heaven – God's heavenly presence and reign and rule and gift of relationship and eternal life. Jesus himself is our "treasure hidden in a field", he is God hidden in human flesh for us to find. He is the "Welcome Stranger" and the "Welcome Nugget" whom God has led us to discover. Through knowing Jesus Christ we enjoy the treasure of God's forgiveness, and a love so deep it is inexhaustible. The riches of inner peace, a deep seated joy and a hope for the future that is dead certain because Christ died to guarantee it – they are some of the treasures of the kingdom of God that we enjoy through Jesus, the Welcome Stranger, the God who has made himself known and available and findable.

We must be the luckiest people on earth. Only it isn't luck. It is a gift, it is grace that is there for everyone. Jesus said "ask and you will receive, seek and you will find..." God puts the treasures of the kingdom where they can be found – in Jesus himself, and in his word the Bible. On treasure maps "X marks the spot" where the treasure can be found, and "X" marks the spot where God's kingdom is found – the cross of Christ. Hidden in Christ's death is our forgiveness and eternal salvation and our place in heaven. On the cross we see the glint of God's love shining for us like a treasure.

People come across treasure and make discoveries in different ways. In Jesus' stories one man was searching for pearls when he came across the most valuable of all. The other man wasn't even looking for treasure. He wasn't working a metal detector but perhaps a plough, going about his daily work but there hidden in the ground all the time was treasure and one day he stumbled on it.

That's how different people come into God's kingdom. Some people are looking and searching and wanting to find peace and inner security and a relationship with God. They try all sorts of religions and spiritualities but then go digging in the Bible or talk to a Christian and come across Jesus Christ and "eureka!" (I've found it!) – they realize they have struck gold!. They have found the pearl they were looking for! They have discovered God himself in Jesus Christ. To their amazement they realise God has been searching for them and found them long before they found him!

Other people aren't looking at all, they are too busy, too focused on this life. Meanwhile right under their noses is treasure, the kingdom of God hidden in people like you – their neighbours and workmates, only they don't see it, until one day God opens their hearts and eyes and ears to realise what you have hidden in you and what has been there for them all along. People come into God's kingdom from different directions and paths but always and only through discovering Jesus Christ.

In his treasure stories about the kingdom there are two reactions to the discovery. One is joy and the other is sacrifice. "in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field"... "he went away and sold everything he had and bought it". To live as a Christian is to live with joy, to live as if you'd won a billion dollars or found the nugget or pearl today. I guess the novelty of that would wear off and the joy of knowing Jesus and being part of the kingdom of heaven sometimes wears off too. To recapture the joy of discovery in some way we need to reflect on where we have come from every day - out of the kingdom of darkness and death into God's kingdom of light and life – that's your baptism talking! Daily remembering how we have been found and claimed by God and how we enjoy the treasures of forgiveness, love, peace and hope and relationship ought to be enough to restore our joy each day, or at least bring a "smile to our dial" as we think how lucky we really are as sinners to have such a God!

And just as one man in Jesus' story went and sold everything to buy the field and the other sold everything to get the pearl, and they staked their lives and futures on what they treasured most, so we Christians stake our lives and eternal futures on Jesus Christ. People left everything during the gold rush days to get their hands on the buried treasure. They put up with discomfort and risked a lot in their greed. How much more will a Christian risk and give up and put up with to make sure we don't lose the treasure we have been given and to ensure the treasure we have is shared with everyone. There is more than enough for all.

As your friends and neighbours and relatives look at you do they see someone whose life looks like they have struck it rich even if you are poor? Do they see someone who is happy to invest time and energy and money for the sake of this treasure from God? Or do they see more of the same in us – people wanting to get our hands on the treasures of this life, grumbling about what we don't have and have missed out on in life? Do we keep the treasure map to ourselves or are we willing to sacrifice to share it with others.

Being a Christian is like having discovered treasure, striking it lucky, having come across something of infinite worth and incredible value. It's like realizing you have the most precious pearl in the world in your possession. But really it is the other way around – the pearl possessed the merchant who sold everything to get his hands on it and the treasure in the field possessed the man who sold everything else he owned to make sure it was his.

Maybe you are wondering if you really have the treasure or not, and maybe some of you feel you have lost your joy in it. Go back to where you found it or it found you, go back to your baptism, go back to the word of God, go back to the spot marked out for discovering God's love for you and that is at the cross of Jesus. And let God restore your inner fortune there! Whether you are searching for God or trudging and stumbling through life, look to Christ who told these treasure stories, and discover again for yourself that you are among the most fortunate people on earth.