

"The Great Investment"

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Reverend J. Stewart Hardy, Ph.D.

Saturday, June 23, 2005
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

"I've a great offer for you Stew." They were the words of my PhD supervisor at the University of Toronto, back when I arrived there late in 1973. "I've got a good tip for you. Go down to the bank of Nova Scotia," he said, "you'll find it on Bay Street; it's getting close to Front. Go down Bay Street, find it and go inside, they have a gold window." And I was thinking, oh that's interesting, and he said, "It's a teller's window. You go in; it's called the gold window. Go in there and buy gold." And I looked as though this man was crazy and he said, "No go do it. Right now it is \$50 an ounce, go and buy some gold."

Now Jesus is talking about something that's as valuable as gold. He's talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. He starts off talking to a crowd of people about this magnificent place, but he talks in stories all the time, and finally the disciples, if you read the whole chapter, the disciples get him aside in the house and their question is about this great kingdom and their investment in it. Why is he always telling stories? And Jesus' comment to them, I am always telling stories because some people listen, but they don't hear. And so I tell these parables, and there will be some who hear the parables who will succeed and some who hear the parables who lose out. Stew, go down to the Bank of Nova Scotia, go to the gold window and buy gold.

And the question for us is the question for the disciples. What does it mean to be told that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to us, it's ours? Is that all there is to it? You know I could have bought that ounce of gold, I guess if I think back right I may have had about \$350 that I could have risked at the gold window. It could have bought how many is that, six, seven ounces of gold. I could have bought seven ounces, **but** it would have meant sacrificing a few things. Most of all sacrificing the comfort that I had a few dollars to support myself while I was on a studentship living in Toronto. And I thought about it and I thought about it, but it was a pretty big cost. Jesus talks to his disciples about calculating this cost of being disciples, and that's us. Jesus is talking to us now that we've been given the promise of heaven, we're actually his disciples and how he's talking about what it is going to cost us. And it seems as though the price is pretty high. Did you hear the parables that Jesus told and that Jim read to us? A pearl of great price and the merchant went and sold all he had in order to buy it; it's just like real estate, isn't it? The treasure that was hidden in the field and the guy who discovered the treasure quickly hides it and off he goes to raise the money in order to buy the field. So what does it mean for us? What is it this promise of life is calling from us, if it's not obedience to Christ and living a Christ like life now? You might say how do you do that, how is that done? Well the first thing is done by what you've done here. You've come here to hear the word of God again. First of all you heard Paul tell you that there is nothing that can snatch you from the love of Christ. That's the first thing we heard tonight. There's nothing, absolutely nothing, bankruptcy, divorce, the death of someone, the death of yourself. There's absolutely nothing, terrorists, nothing. Not even the IRS can work something that will take you out of Christ's love. That's a given, it's there for you. Then Jesus talks to us about that love does something to us, it changes the way we live and act. Well it changed the way you live and act, you're here 5:30 on Saturday, didn't have to be here, but you were. That's the first thing.

The second thing is you're invited into a verbal relationship with God through Christ, it's called prayer. Now most people think prayer is asking for stuff. Can you imagine how God feels? Just like the parent taking the kid through the supermarket, do you remember? The last time you

took your grandkids, do you remember that? Do you remember what that was like, do you remember taking your own children to the supermarket, I want this, I want that, I want something else. But there is more to prayer than that. There's actually sharing our life, what's happening in the day and especially the things that have made us afraid or depressed or feeling as though we're losing it or we don't have it, or whatever it is. Just some one to talk to who will listen to us. Some of us have husbands and wives, but they don't listen all the time. But God's ready to listen. He invites us into conversation with him and when it comes to living out our discipleship, starting to really pay the price, he asks us to pray about that. Doesn't ask us to go off and take on some huge task. He asks us to pray and he will demonstrate to us or reveal to us what we ought to do.

And then there is what we do with our financial stuff. Is it costly to be a disciple? You betcha. Cost us 10%. It's a very simple thing, we're asked to tithe. And not willy nilly, it is just a tithe to the church, to the presence and body of Christ. Why? So that the body of Christ can do what it's being called to do. This is where the real cost comes in. And the last cost is the most puzzling cost of all often. It is just to try and be Christ in the world. You know?

So Jesus is talking to the disciples and he's telling them you are going to go from here, you are going to need to keep in touch with me, you are going to have to remember my word, you are going to have to go and teach others. It's going to be costly, but they are to live as disciples in the world. Because, you see, they'll never be deserted. Then they are reminded that what their doing might be in their eyes as insignificant as a mustard seed. Do you know what the problem is living in America? The only people we adore are the people who do the big things. The guy who makes it to the baseball hall of fame, the football player whose history in the game is outstanding, the Donald Trumps of the world who amass millions of dollars. Jesus doesn't say that. Jesus says you know, even the smallest act of discipleship is like a mustard seed. We're not asked to be the harvesting department. We're just asked to be the planning department. To reach out and touch others with compassion and love. We're not even asked to be the pruners, the critics who come in and say this is wrong, that's wrong and you ought to have done, and why aren't they.....we're just ask to plant the seed. A tiny seed, like the tiny seed of faith that has been planted in us. We nurture that seed by coming to church, by our daily devotions, by our prayer, by receiving Holy Communion so that that tiny grain of faith in us can grow. See Jesus doesn't set production levels for us to meet. We're not the Christian factory; we're not Willy Wonka's of Christendom. We're just asked to take those tiny seeds and to act as best we can in Christ's love because that makes all the difference.

You see if only, if only I'd taken that \$350 to the gold window, The Bank of Nova Scotia, within six months gold was running \$800+ an ounce. How much would I have made? Is there any body here who is brilliant with numbers like that? Yea, \$4 or \$5,000 on a \$300 investment. I didn't do it. You notice how the lesson is. That's God's love, God's grace; his offer of promise is given to everyone. The net of God's grace reaches everyone. Some that are caught are kept, and some that are caught are thrown back. I suspect that the ones who are caught in the net and kept are the ones who have risked God's love growing in them and risked trying to be Christ in the world. It's all that's asked of us, to be compassionate, caring, and loving one of the other for Christ's sake. Why? Well we've got a gold certificate, haven't we? The Kingdom of Heaven has been promised to us, not because we earned it, but because God sees it clearly in our lives, even if it's as tiny as a seed of mustard.

Amen.