

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, 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.”  
(Matthew 13:44-46)*

Have you ever accidentally dropped anything overboard into the river? It’s not a good feeling. Laura, our board chair knows this well. On Monday this past week she dropped her cellphone overboard while kayaking. Now iPhones are somewhat waterproof and it was still talking to her watch! So there was some hope of recovering it. John, a member of our congregation, got his snorkel gear out and dove down for her hoping to find it. But it was deep enough and the weeds were high, so he couldn’t find it. They called the local dive shop to enlist their help, but it was going to cost \$200 for them to look and there was no guarantee they’d find it in the mud and the weeds. There was also no guarantee the phone would still be working if, and by the time, they did recover it. In the end they called off the search because it wasn’t worth it. So if anyone is wanting a free iPhone, it’s yours for the taking — somewhere between St. Lawrence Park and Smith Island if I understood the location correctly.

It’s a tough decision to make. How do you decide when to keep searching when there is a cost and when to cut your losses? I suppose it depends on how much value you ascribe to it.

This has been a front-of-mind question in Manitoba in recent months as they seek to decide whether or not to search the Prairie Green Landfill for the remains of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran. The two women are victims of an alleged serial killer, and police believe their remains are located below the surface of the privately-run landfill. The premier of Manitoba, Heather Stefanson, said earlier this month that her government would not provide support to search the Prairie Green landfill, citing the cost and the safety for those searching. One study says a search could take up to three years and cost approximately \$184 million. It warns there are risks due to exposure to toxic chemicals. Other studies say it is possible and point to examples where landfills have been successfully searched for remains.

Losing a loved one is always difficult. Losing a loved one tragically and not having the remains to honour and provide a respectful burial is deeply damaging to family. Especially when the family is Indigenous. Especially when they have

been told in overt and subtle ways for hundreds of years you have less or no value. Especially when we know and have identified the need to end the crises of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

Others would argue for common sense. That's a lot of money after all, for no guarantees. Money that maybe could be spent on other things.

Do you remember last month's news about the Titan submersible that imploded on its tour to visit the Titanic with five people on board? You probably know that Canada jumped in to help with the search. Do you know that it cost at least \$2.4 million to deploy a single Canadian aircraft to search for the submersible that went missing? And it wasn't just the Aurora marine aircraft that went searching. Canada sent ships such as the Royal Canadian Navy's HMCS Glace Bay and the Canadian Coast Guard's John Cabot, Terry Fox and helicopter-equipped Ann Harvey. The cost of operating the navy's HMCS Glace Bay alone is about \$47,000 per sailing day. We don't know exactly how much the search cost Canadians, but it was massive. And these are just the costs for the Canadian part of the search. The US search was larger. The skeptical part of me can't help but wonder if the value of those on board was deemed to be very high. All were very rich, two of them were billionaires and each paid \$250,000 for the tour.

Now this is an extreme and not a totally fair comparison, because international maritime law dictates that all states have a duty to render assistance to any person in distress at sea, regardless of nationality or status on humanitarian grounds. This law interestingly (ironically) was brought about in part because of the sinking of the Titanic. So Canada had a duty to jump in and help search. Still, it makes you wonder. How do we decide the worth and the value? How do we decide how much we will spend to find what is lost(*Matthew 13:44-46*)?

Who sells everything to buy a pearl, a pearl that you probably are not willing to sell? How rich are you if you sell everything you own to hold onto an item like a pearl? How smart is that? Selling everything to buy a field with buried treasure makes a little more sense to me – presumably the treasure is worth more than the field.

Important things almost always come with a cost. If you want to recover your health, often you have to give things up and work at it. For some, health becomes almost a fulltime job. If you want recovery, you have to work at it. If you want a good relationship with someone, you have to put some effort into it. People often take relationships for granted and that's not a good idea. Reconciliation with Indigenous people comes with a cost. Simply saying "I'm sorry this tragedy, and all that bad stuff in the last 200 years happened to you." Without any action, makes the apology empty. If we say with our lips that the

lives of Indigenous women are worth as much as the lives of white middle-class women but then say, “The cost is too great to keep searching” then one more time we have said, “You have value, but not *that* much value.”

Jesus told a series of parables to describe the kingdom of God. Jesus invites us to think differently about the kingdom of God through these stories, and there isn't just one way to interpret them. They deliberately draw us in and make us wonder what they mean.

These two short parables are usually interpreted as our seeking and searching for the kingdom of God. God's love and forgiveness and grace and peace and joy are worth so, so much. It's priceless. But the kingdom of heaven is also somewhat hidden ... or at least not obvious. The shiny things of this world are obvious. Not just the shiny things but the shiny accomplishments that everyone says that you should have: a successful career, a stable marriage, a nice car and house. Shakespeare reminds us that “*All that glitters is not gold.*” In other words, there is so much that we value and seek and cling to that at the end of the day has no lasting or real value. Sometimes we miss what is truly valuable.

Be careful what you cling to and what you value and prize the most! I remember an object-lesson game we played when I was in the youth group here. We were given five pieces of paper, and on each of them we had to write something that we valued most. So you had in front of you the five things you valued most in your life. Then the host went around with a wastepaper basket and said, “If you had to lose one of them, which would it be?” and we had to toss one in the wastepaper basket.

Now this is an easier game to play when you are a teenager! I still remember Michael Lacey, Ann's son, saying on the first round “Well, there goes my sister!” Of course his sister, Heather, was there playing the game too! Anyway this happened four times, until we each had one thing left in our hand. The host of the game then said “Look at what you have in your hand. If what you have left can be stolen, burned up in a fire, die or be destroyed, then put it in the basket. If it can't, you can keep it.” These object lessons are a little simple, but they make a point about recognizing what we value and cling to and what is truly priceless.

Last week my sermon was titled “Stairway to Heaven” and it was about Jacob's dream of the stairway or the ladder to heaven. The opening line of song “Stairway to Heaven” is: “*There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold and she's buying a stairway to heaven.*” It's a play on Shakespeare's line and an arrow pointing at our consumer society that wants what it wants and is willing to pay anything to get it. Jacob clung to the idea of an inheritance and a blessing from his father, and he wanted it so badly he was willing to lie and deceive his father and cheat his brother out of it to get it.

The incredible thing is that what Jacob found as he was running from his

furious brother ended up being so much greater than an inheritance and a blessing from his earthly father. He discovered a stairway, a connection, a gateway to the presence of God. He received a blessing and a promise from his Heavenly Father that would last for generations.

Actually, Jacob didn't discover it. Other than believing the dream and the promise I'm not sure Jacob deserves too much credit in the story. *It was God who met Jacob. It was God who found Jacob on the run. It was God who decided to bless that scoundrel, that lying, cheating Jacob. It was God who decided that, despite everything, Jacob was worth seeking and finding.*

What if these parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great price are about God seeking us? Leaving everything and selling everything because God sees in us a pearl of great value, a treasure buried in a field — that others have overlooked or forgotten about?

As it is says in Romans chapter 8, the First Nations Version:

*“What more can be said? If Creator stands with us, who can stand against us? If the Great Spirit did not hold back his own Son, but instead gave him up for us all, will he then hold back on anything else? Along with his Son, he will give us all there is to give.” (Romans 8:31-32)*

God loves you so much it is hard to describe it. When you catch a glimpse of that love, taste the joy and peace that come from it, it changes you. It changes what you value. You can't help but start loving and valuing what God loves and values, and be willing to pay any price to have and to share that love, that justice, that grace.

Whatever happens with the searching of the remains of the women, I know that God has already sought out and brought home his precious daughters Morgan and Mercedes – they can't be hurt anymore.

*One thing I know for sure. Nothing can separate us from Creator's love. Not death or life. Not spirit-messengers or dark spirit-rulers. Nothing from the spirit-world above or on the earth below. Nothing today or in the days to come. Not one thing in all creation can separate us from his great love, a love that is ours in the Chosen One, Creator Sets Free (Jesus), our Honored Chief!*

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life my all.

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