

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, June 25, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Finders-Keepers”

READING: Matthew 13:44 – Jesus told this parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

As I’ve told you before it is my habit to run three days a week. I run 4 miles on Tuesday, then 3 miles on both Thursday and Friday, so ten for the week. As I run I see all manner of items lying alongside and on the road. You’d be appalled at how many nails, screws, and broken glass I see there. No wonder we get flat tires on occasion.

From time to time I find more valuable items. I have a small pile of change I’ve picked up in the last six months or so. The coins are usually scarred and misshapen from being repeatedly run over. When I have enough of them to make it worth my while, I will take them to the bank and exchange them for useful coinage. I’ve found useful wire, bungee cords and tie-down straps, boards, and other assorted odds-and-ends.

I use those items in confirmation class when we talk about the seventh commandment and Luther’s injunction that we are to “help our neighbor keep his property and business.” I ask the kids if the following statement has a place in this: “Finders keepers – losers weepers.” If I find an item along the road, may I keep it even though it doesn’t belong to me? They always hesitate to answer because they sense I might be setting a trap! While they’re chewing on this I tell them about one of my youth group girls in Royal Oak who, while we were swimming up to our necks in a lake, suddenly dove underwater and came back up holding a \$20 bill she had stepped on and retrieved. I ask them, “May she keep that twenty?”

And the answer is “yes”. Unless there is a way to identify the owner of such items, it is good stewardship to take and make use of them. I tell them to give God thanks for the extra gift and use them wisely. In our brief reading for today, Jesus does not indicate a moral lapse in the man who finds the buried treasure. He has no idea who originally buried it there, but having found it, he hides it once more and then buys the field. Obviously the owner of that field does not know about the treasure, or he would not readily sell that field. It isn’t his, so the man who found it and now owns the field it is in can claim it and joyfully use it as his own.

Now, I also tell them another story. I went out early one morning to put an envelope in our mailbox. When I opened the mailbox, there lay a wallet. When I examined it, I found it contained almost \$200 in cash and an ID card for one of my son Dan’s neighborhood friends. Turns out that friend had come by the evening before on his bike, told Dan he was leaving with his family the following day for a vacation, and must have had the wallet (with all of his vacation money) in his back pocket. As he rode away, the seat pushed the wallet out of his pocket, and he didn’t miss it. Someone, I have no idea who, must have come by after that or in the morning before I came out of the house and put the wallet in our mailbox, assuming someone in our household would know who it belonged to. Now that person followed Luther’s injunction to the “T”. That person could have taken the wallet or just the cash, but seeing the ID card was for a youngster and seeing the basketball hoop in our yard, that person assumed someone in our home had lost it and put it where we would find it. Well done, whoever you were.

So “Finders Keeper - Losers Weepers” is a thing. We do our best to secure someone’s possessions for them, but in cases where no owner can reasonably be found, the treasure, small or large, becomes a gift we can thank God for and use for good purposes.

Oh, and by the way, that little parable is often misinterpreted, I think. The usual explanation is that the Kingdom of God is so precious that we should be prepared to give up anything to gain it. The problem with that is that we don’t earn, buy, deserve, or “find” that Kingdom. It is given to us by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. I think Jesus is the One who finds what he treasures, you and I, and “in his joy he went and sold all he had” to buy the field and with it the treasure. In Jesus’ kingdom he gave all that he had to pay for our sins and to claim us as his own, scarred and bent as we are by sin. He loved us with a love we can never fathom, bought us at a price we can never estimate, and gives us a Kingdom beyond our knowledge. We were the losers and weepers but through Jesus we are found and kept...and THAT is our joy! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) VBS! Thanks to everyone who made our VBS the special experience that it was. Special thanks to Pastor Woods, Helen Bohannon, Mitzi Lyon-Schmelz, Joan Longest, Amy Meyer, Ben Wehmiller, Kathy Scheibelhut, the Kitchen Crew, and everyone else who helped bless the children for whom all the work brought joy.

2) FRANKENMUTH BUS TRIP – September 29-October 2. Registration is now open. Find information and forms in “News & Tidbits”, online, and in the Narthex. 53 seats available.