

July 26, 2020 – Rev. Tab Ottmers

God's grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon this morning is the Gospel reading that was just read, the parables of Jesus.

We many times are like, well, we many times are like a blind appraiser. Many times, we don't value repentance and forgiveness and one another as the treasure we are in Christ. This is because of sin, because of pride. Jesus, who had no sins to confess, freely forgives you, finds you, pulls you out of your grave of sin and treasures you and his value never changes.

This week, Emily and I found ourselves watching that old favorite television show, “Antique Roadshow.” It was, of course, a rerun. People were standing right by each other with no masks, and no gloves. There was no shaking of hands. I mean, there was shaking of hands, large numbers of people indoors. It looked to be a very dangerous place.

Of course, all the shows were reruns. But what the directors did for this show, in running shows from the years past, I think it was from 2015. The professionals they would give their estimates as they did back in 2015, and then the value would pop up on the screen. But then a couple of moments later, another graphic would pop up and it would say, “value in 2020.”

Some of the values went up, some of the values went down.

In 2015, you wouldn't even have considered spending probably the amounts of money you've spent on face coverings. But now they are so valuable. You can be refused medicine and food if you don't wear one to the store. Companies that have made hand sanitizers, gloves, ventilators, they have all become very valuable companies. Their stocks have gone through the roof. Politicians, they sold large portions of their stock right before the stock market crashed. They saw the collapse of our economy coming before any of us did. Their values changed rather quickly. Politicians tend to do that; in case you haven't noticed. Well, today Jesus preaches to us parables for us to consider the value of the kingdom of God.

We know what things we value. I could venture to say we value our family, friends, our health, our retirement funds, our church. Jesus teaches us today what and how the kingdom of God come to value; what God considers valuable.

In “Antiques Roadshow,” part of the fun of the television show is the mystery, the surprise. A German ceramic that looks nothing spectacular. It had a unique story. And so, what at

first looked cheap and common was worth \$20,000. That value had gone up \$5,000 since 2015. Other things of course lost value. Perhaps a golden laid rotary telephone, or that high speed floppy disk drive.

Have your values changed over the years? Things that you really valued when you were a teenager, a college student, a young family? Do you still have those same desires and wants? Has what you valued changed? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. There's no mistaking what this man values.

One might conclude that his values had changed once he found the treasure. That at one time he valued all his possessions, but then when he was surprised by the treasure, he changed. But maybe his values didn't change. Maybe all along, he was working toward finding that hidden treasure. And when the time was right, he gave all that he had because his values never changed. All along the man was seeking that which he valued above all things.

He never gave up. Have you ever saved up, kept track of every penny, because of that one thing that you wanted? This is the character of God that Jesus is teaching us in this parable. His values and what he values never changes. Our values change like grass blown along this way and that way along the sidewalk swaying this way with the wind. We are on fire for God's word and we love it one day but the next we kind of get burned out.

Our value system is sometimes not on target. Has the Coronavirus caused you to evaluate what you hold valuable? It should. For the better. Has it increased your devotional life, your prayer life? Has it helped you to hear more of God's Word? Or has it changed you for the worse?

You know that according to polls, 32% of regular churchgoers have stopped watching church online. For 32% of regular churchgoers, their values have changed. Major life issues sometimes shake us, and our values change.

If you remember the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors, a story of value. He loved his coat. It was valuable to him it was given to him by his father. But Joseph's brothers, they didn't value him. They hated him. In fact, they sold their brother into slavery to Egypt. They were jealous and their values changed because of anger. They valued whatever goods or money they gained from selling out their brother. They valued material things above their brother. We too have sold out to our brother Jesus by our sin. He is our brother, St. Paul points this out in our second reading. He is our brother. But how often we love the material things, more than the forgiveness of sins. He's one for us on the cross. Jesus is embodied in your children, your parents, your spouse, and how easy it is for us to think we're getting ripped off when we have to serve them.

You, if you're anything like me, your sinful nature would much rather value your alone time. Our values are backwards. Like a blind appraiser. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive, including your most valuable asset, time. And how do we value confession and forgiveness? Not just here in our church service, but with one another. With everyone. Including our enemies. What happens in our worship service is important. With confession and absolution, the pattern of the worship service is meant to shape your everyday life. What we do here in the worship service is meant to be lived out in your life on a daily basis. We are to be regularly confessing and forgiving one another.

Sometimes that's the most difficult though, isn't it? Because it involves something very valuable to us. Our pride. The measure of how we value ourselves. Especially when someone doesn't deserve forgiveness. Or we think they don't deserve our confession.

"Pastor they'll never change."

"How many times must I forgive my brother?"

We make it harder for ourselves to forgive, because we value a grudge more than we do forgiveness. It's expensive to forgive someone who sinned against you to give up your place of supposed power and say, "I forgive you."

I recognize the great forgiveness I have received from God. And I consider myself a forgiven sinner. Just like I announced to you. But the forgiveness that you have, you didn't buy. You did nothing to deserve God's mercy. He found you buried in a field of sin and death. Maybe he even found you digging further. Shovel after shovel standing knee deep in the mud and muck of sin, going further down. Making yourself rich in sin.

But that's where Christ Jesus finds all of us. He washes us, he digs us, he pulls us out of our tomb. Finding us. You are his treasure. He washes you in life giving water. He doesn't find you to mock you. He isn't embarrassed by your sin. He doesn't say, "well, they're just going to sin again." He doesn't first place you in front of an expert to tell him if you're valuable enough.

No, he gives his very life. He doesn't care. He values you. He loves you above all things. He doesn't love your sin. God hates sin. But that's why he finds you to forgive you and to remove every one of your sins. Like finding an odd antique that nobody appreciates.

Some of you are more antique than others, some of you more odd than others. No one expects God to find value in sinners. The God who created the stars the earth, the God who made gold, the God who forged diamonds, he gives up his son to have you. He gives up his most treasured possession, because in giving up Jesus to pay for your sins, he gets back that which he's treasured all along.

Asking for forgiveness from one another is probably the most expensive of all. Because we give up our pride. Confessing to someone a sin in order to receive forgiveness means you value forgiveness. It means you value having God's forgiveness spoken to you. You want the value that God places on you. You want his appraisal, you want to be declared forgiven. And so he does. Your value's not in anything you do. It's not the size of your portfolio. It's not because you've been successful in this manner or that in life. God values you and forgives you all your sins because of Jesus.

Even when you've acted as if his word is not valuable. If you have hated. If you've treated one another with scorn. If you've begrudged giving your time and effort to someone else, our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified to pay the price for those sins. Every one of your sins is gone.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure. A treasure that never loses value to Jesus because he never changes. The forgiveness that he gave so much up for. That's for you to draw on.

And yes, we will continue to misjudge the value of these goods, the sacrament, God's word each other. However, the love of God and Christ Jesus never changes. His blood poured out on the cross to purchase you from sin, death, and the devil. Draw on that value. Spend the forgiveness. Daily remember your baptism, taken from a watery grave and given life. Be resolved to treasure this, above all things.

Because you have this treasure in jars of clay. Like a blind appraiser, the world may not value you. The devil certainly doesn't value you; you're just chattel. Your friends may betray you, your family might leave you. Jesus never will. He gave his life for you. His heavenly father sees you through the perfect death and resurrection and you are most precious to him.

His value never changes. So, when we do arrive, when all the fish are gathered together, it'll be no surprise for you.

He's already told you, "I forgive you all your sins."

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.