

Years ago when Ebay first launched, I remember wondering if it was something that Jesus would have liked? You know, Ebay right, the online garage sale where you can bid on, and buy, virtually anything you can think of? Yes, I think Jesus may have liked it. Now, to be clear, Jesus probably wouldn't have been an avid collector of *Star Wars* memorabilia, or a seller of knock-off Lui Vaton purses. No, Jesus would have probably loved eBay because in the Gospels we witness the idea that Jesus appears to love a good deal. He's all about the joy that comes from discovering something valuable - possibly priceless - while perusing piles of seemingly ordinary items.

It's the joy that Morace Park, a British antiques dealer, felt after paying five bucks for an old film container. Inside he found a never-released seven-minute movie featuring Charlie Chaplin. It was later valued at sixty thousand dollars. It's the feeling Philip Gura, an American literature professor, had after paying four hundred and eighty one dollars for a photograph of poet Emily Dickinson. That snapshot is only the second photo of Dickinson known to exist, which makes Gura's discovery priceless.

Lastly, can you put a price tag on love? Maria Ariz, a nurse from New Jersey, paid \$16 on eBay for a pair of jeans. When she wrote the seller to ask about other items, the two fell in love, and have been married for sixteen years. Now that's a good deal -- and Jesus would have loved it! Ok, you might be thinking to

yourself, how could we know that? Well, Matthew chapter 13, with its parables about hidden treasures and pearls of great price, tells us so. A man stumbles across a pile of treasure buried in a field. He's so taken with his discovery, so overwhelmed at its value, that he sells off every other item in his possession to purchase the land and make the treasure his own. You might call it overkill, but Jesus says, "Nope. That's a heck of a deal."

A merchant who makes his living pushing pearls spends his days scouring the markets for the best of the best. Upon finally finding it, the man mortgages his home and sells his cars on Craigslist... all to purchase a single, sparkling pearl. You might think it a waste, but not at all in the eyes of Jesus. For him, such sacrifice, for such treasure, is well worth the investment.

You see...our Lord Jesus is all about the joy *that comes from discovering something priceless while perusing the ordinary*. In fact, for Jesus, the greatest of such joys, the most magnificent of flea market finds, and unexpected eBay treasures, is none other than the kingdom of heaven. In the parables I just read, Jesus tells us that the very reign and rule of God, the loving and life-changing activity of God in heaven, has broken into our world and is available now! It's here to be discovered and embraced. Yet, like a Mickey Mantel baseball card found at a yard sale tucked away in a photo album, the kingdom of heaven is found in

unassuming places and encountered in unlikely ways. And whatever it costs for you to "get" it is well worth it.

So the big question then is this: *In what unlikely places do we find God's power and presence?* Some people think that the key to discovering God, is in getting mystical and otherworldly. These individuals might embrace some sort of process of escaping the trappings of the flesh and the world, by finding ways to ascend to some higher plane where God abides through meditation or some other form of new age practice. Yet, that doesn't seem to jibe with Jesus' idea of the kingdom being uncovered in the ordinary, now does it?

Others might argue that the key to connecting with the kingdom is being good enough to gain admittance. You know, help enough old ladies across the street, donate enough money to charity, make a lot of people smile, avoiding making people cry at all costs, and when your days are done *boom*-you're in the kingdom. But that seems at odds with Jesus' own description of the kingdom as a treasure being stumbled upon in a field, as if it's something freely given. Doesn't it?

No, encountering God, experiencing God's power, and being caught up in God's love must be things we can encounter in the ordinary, and access easily. What about *here*? Is this a place where we encounter the kingdom? Think about it for a moment. Jesus' ultimate point in the parable is that he was the means by which the kingdom had come to Earth. It was in him that the love of God, the

power of God, and a reconciled right relationship with God, could all be received. Christ and his work on the cross is a parallel to the sacrifices being made by the characters in his parables, his stories, for he indeed gave up everything, just as they did, to obtain the treasure in the field, and the pearl of great price. And whenever we gather online for worship, or in the parking lot at church, we experience the very same Jesus who forfeited more than we can ever know, or understand, to bring us into the Kingdom.

Which begs the question, do you believe that? Do you believe that when we gather here, in this unassuming place, that the greatest treasure in the history of God's universe is here for the taking? Do you believe that when God's Word is read here, preached here, or sung here, that Jesus is speaking here? Do you believe that when you hear, "Your sins are forgiven," "You're forever a member of God's family" or "The body of Christ broken for you, the blood of Christ shed for you, " that the power and promises of Christ are taking hold in you and doing something miraculous in you?

To be sure, by sight and sound alone this seems like the last "field" in which you'd find something so special. This place is filled to the brim with imperfect people, including myself, and I often preach sermons about God's forgiveness and hope that to an unbelieving world might sound like absolute insanity. The apostle

Paul said as much himself. "...the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Here's another one to wrestle with: What if the work of the kingdom is not only found here, but what if it is also found in us? Have you thought about that one? If you're a baptized, believing follower of Jesus Christ, then the Scriptures tell us that you are now a living, breathing "field," filled with the priceless treasures of Jesus. Yes, with all of our past mistakes and present problems, we are filled with the truth of Christ that can change someone else's eternity. We're filled with the Holy Spirit who's given us the same compassion as Christ, and a desire, like Christ, to bless others in need. Yes, we are now part of a royal priesthood whose very presence has the power to "...proclaim the greatness of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Yes, we as a community, and each of us individually as believers, are the unlikely, ordinary and easily accessible places where the greatest treasure in the world can be found and encountered. With that realization comes an incredible responsibility. We - you - are the field for the wandering to stumble upon salvation. We are the marketplace of pearls where the seeker can finally find what he or she is looking for. We are the online auction house where a hurting world can bid on trash and receive untold treasure in the form of forgiveness, unlimited, and life-unending.

In knowing such things, what is your reaction, how do these truths make you feel? Do you come to this place each week expecting to hear from God himself, and have an encounter with the kingdom? Are you inviting others to this field so they too can find the treasure in this field? Are you offering others the undeserved compassion of Christ? Are you ready and willing to answer the seeking, the lost, by sharing your faith and knowledge about the life-changing truth of Christ?

Perhaps you're here as a seeker, or a wanderer yourself? One of the more popular shows on television is A&E's *Storage Wars*. It follows a group of men and women who make their living bidding on the opportunity to take ownership of unopened, repossessed storage units, in the hopes of finding hidden treasure. Yes, it is an actual television show. where they've discovered everything from coffins and artwork, to the world's most valuable comic book collection, all while paying as little as ten dollars to take it all home.

If you're here as a seeker, or a wanderer, then what you need to know is that you have a lot in common with such modern day treasure hunters. Today and whenever we gather in the name of Christ, it is possible for us to discover and experience the kind of treasure that only God himself can offer. Yes, it comes at a cost. Taking ownership of all that God has in store for us through Jesus Christ will come at the cost of confessing our brokenness and our need for a savior. It means saying goodbye to a life of wandering, and living a life of worshiping Jesus. It will

mean that our days of searching are done, and finding peace in the fact that we've arrived in God's family.

Some years ago, a Pastor named Mike Ernst of Hales Corners, Wisconsin stumbled across an old Corvette. As a car aficionado he knew he'd found something unique in the early 1960s', rusted and worn-out Chevrolet. Buying it from a college student who was tooling around in it, Ernst took it to his barn and began the slow work of restoration. It soon became clear that this was no ordinary, old Corvette. Some searching on the Internet revealed that Pastor Mike's old clunker was in fact the world famous 1962 Gulf Oil Corvette - a car that won first place twelve times in races at Daytona, Sebring, and beyond. When Ernst found the car, he paid three thousand for it. It was later sold at auction for \$1.4 million dollars.

Yes, I think Jesus would have loved eBay. Our Lord loves a good bargain, an incredible deal, and the joy that comes from discovering something valuable - possibly priceless - while perusing piles of ordinary items. Why? Because he's offering the most incredible item around: himself! Free of charge.

May this be a place where the treasure of a Christ is easily encountered. May the treasure of Christ be accessible for the world, in you. And may you, wanderer and seeker alike, find this treasure whenever you seek it. Remember God's

Kingdom is not always to be found in expected places; and no matter what the price tag may be, it is definitely, undeniably worth the cost. Amen.