

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (7/26-27/2008)

1 Kings 3/5-12, Psalm 119, Romans 8/28-30, Matthew 13/44-52

Last week, we considered farmers and weeds, a housewife and bread, and a mustard seed.

This week, there is a different set of parables: a treasure buried in a field, a pearl of great price and a great catch of edible and inedible fish.

As we tried to show last week, Jesus lays the reality of the Kingdom down alongside commonplace events – well, actually, not that commonplace.

After all, finding buried treasure is the stuff of legends and adventure stories; and pearls, or jewels of great price, have motivated many a mystery story even to the point of violence.

As for the fish, not too exciting; they would have been more appropriate for last week's line-up.

But a treasure buried in a field is bound to grab our attention.

The one who finds it re-buries it, and then goes off, saying nothing to anyone, and purchases that treasure-laden field. Once he owns the field, he digs up the booty.

I wonder what he says to people who ask where he got the treasure, because that treasure, by law, really belongs to the people in whose field it is first found.

Obviously, Jesus isn't concerned at this point with the niceties of the laws of possession.

He wants us to partake of the joy of the treasure-hunter because something precious which was buried out of sight is now found.

The Kingdom is about joy in the finding of something of great value.

Is it we who find the treasure of God, or is it God who finds us as a great treasure?

The pearl of great price offers a bit of a problem as well.

When a man goes and sells all he has in order to purchase one extremely valuable gem, what does he do for an encore?

Where does he get money for rent or food for his family?

You can't make soup and a sandwich out of a precious pearl.

Again, Jesus wants us to feel the joy of the occasion, not the problems that ensue.

It's important to acknowledge that Jesus is not being immoral or indifferent in proposing these parables.

He knows the value of surprise in our lives, and he appreciates the simple pleasure of rejoicing when good things happen.

Well, good things always happen around us; we are after all in the very presence of the Lord.

Now, finding hidden treasure or valuable gems is no guarantee of happiness in our lives.

Every so often, you read about some person who wins big in the lottery; invariably there seem to be a lot more complications in his or her life.

When we discover the path to God, however, when we learn to open ourselves to divine grace and help, the possibilities of happiness multiply enormously.

But there are also challenges - you can count on it.

A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus say that "*my yolk is easy and my burden is light.*"

All in all, this "Kingdom" business that Jesus spins parables about holds great promise.

It's like a joyous party waiting to happen.

Who wouldn't like a great party, especially with the Lord?